FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE

ANC

featuring:

ISLAND IN THE SKY
by Manly Wade Wellman

HYPERPELOSITY
by L. Sprague de Camp

STOLEN CENTURIES
by Otis Adelbert Kline

EXPERIMENT
by Roscoe Clark

THE MAN WHO LOOKED LIKE STEINMETZ
by Robert Moore Williams

SEPT. 25¢

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Draw This Car

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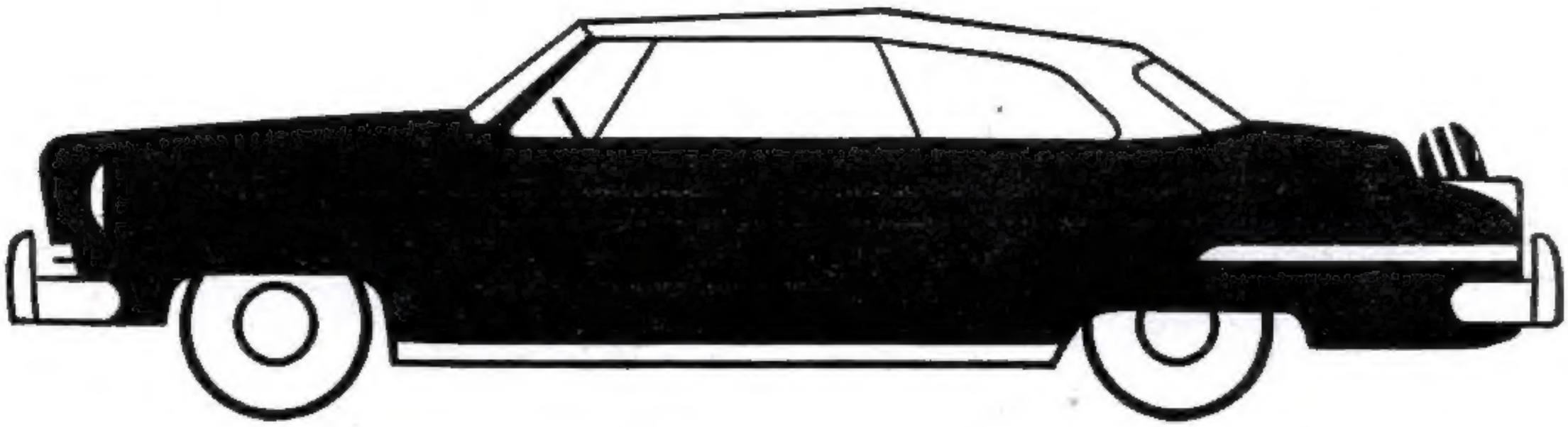

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If your drawing shows promise we give you professional comments on it free! Trained illustrators, artists and cartoonists now making big money. Find out now if YOU have profitable art talent. You've nothing to lose—*everything to gain*. Mail your drawing today.

AMATEURS ONLY! Our students not eligible. Make copy of car 8 ins. long. Pencil or pen only. Omit the lettering. All drawings must be received by Sept. 30, 1953. None returned. Winners notified.

ART INSTRUCTION, INC., Dept. 7633
500 S. 4th, Minneapolis 15, Minn.

Please enter my attached drawing in your Draw a Car contest. **(PLEASE PRINT)**

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*Address*_____ *Phone*_____

*City*_____ *Zone*____ *County*_____

*State*_____ *Occupation*_____

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THE INSIDE STORY OF THE ABOVE ADVERTISEMENT

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She's holding a sheaf of reports from I. C. S. ten-year graduates. This group alone shows an average pay increase of 103%. You can match it!

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Average income for all U.S. men	$2,449.00	$2,845.00	16%
Average income for college graduates (men)*	$3,537.00	$4,618.00	30%
Average income for 41 I. C. S. graduates surveyed Jan. '53	$2,514.63 before I. C. S. training	$5,114.84 today	103%

* From "They Went to College," Haverman & West

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FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

•

VOL. 6, No. 2
SEPTEMBER, 1953

A Classic Novel

ISLAND IN THE SKY . . . . . **MANLY WADE WELLMAN** **10**
They were smashing more than atoms. They were smashing man's hope for a decent life — and Blackie broke jail to stop it!

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NOW IT'S EASY to make BIG MONEY in a profit-making, spare-time business! As our man in your community, you feature Mason's fast-selling Horsehide, Capeskin, Suede, other fine leather jackets — nationally known for smart styling, rugged wear, wonderful warmth. Start by selling to friends and fellow workers. Think of all the outdoor workers around your own home who will be delighted to buy these fine jackets from you. truck drivers, milkmen, cab drivers, gas station, construction men — hundreds in your own community! You'll be amazed how quickly business grows. And no wonder! — You offer these splendid jackets at low money-saving prices people can afford! Our top-notch men find it's easy to make up to $10.00 a day EXTRA income!

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- Warm, cozy linings of real Sheepskin . . . nature's own protection against cold!
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Dept. MA-81
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A DEPARTMENT WHERE SCIENCE-FICTION READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

WHENEVER our Army or Navy catches up with science fiction by copying a gadget we have been using for years in stories, it makes headlines in the papers and picture stories in the magazines. It is now our duty to report that the armed forces have stolen a march on us.

In the matter of clothing designed to stand the rigors of extreme temperatures, such as may be encountered on inhospitable planets, or just in the general pattern of clothing of the future, both authors and artists have shown little imagination. The whole question has been begged by glossing over with general phrases about insulation and so on. Almost no one has given readers an idea of what insulation in clothing involves.

Our personal hobby happens to be climbing mountains—earthside—so we have for long made something of a hobby of clothing insulation. Our own experimental findings were, for a long time, unsupported by a more scientific research, until the recent prolonged cold weather tests conducted by the Army and Navy. We are now in tune with science.

The warmth of a garment, it seems, has less to do with the substance of which it is made than the construction. The only principle involved is the trapping of air in dead spaces so that it can be warmed by body heat and not be permitted to circulate or lose its heat by contact with the outer cold air. Natural materials which have a highly porous structure, or which consist of millions of tiny hairs, fronds, or fibers, form these dead air spaces automatically and so are good insulators. Wool, feathers down, fur—these are the staples.

What is not so well known is that cotton is every bit as good an insulator as wool, being just as fibrous and trapping just as much air when it is new. The only difference is that cotton is not as resilient as wool. With use it mats down and loses most of its air spaces. Wool springs back into shape, so retains its insulating qualities almost indefinitely. Nevertheless, the Chinese have long used quilted cotton jackets for cold weather and with cotton so much less expensive than wool, it might pay to make a new jacket when the old loses its effectiveness.

Down from northern waterfowl is the springiest, warmest and lightest of the natural materials. We are the proud possessor of a down-quilted jacket which only required a second mortgage on the house to buy, but which is guaranteed by the maker to be warm at 40 below zero. However being warm depends also on your activity. If you stand still you will eventually chill through at 32 above, we have found, while if you keep moving you will be warm at very low temperatures.

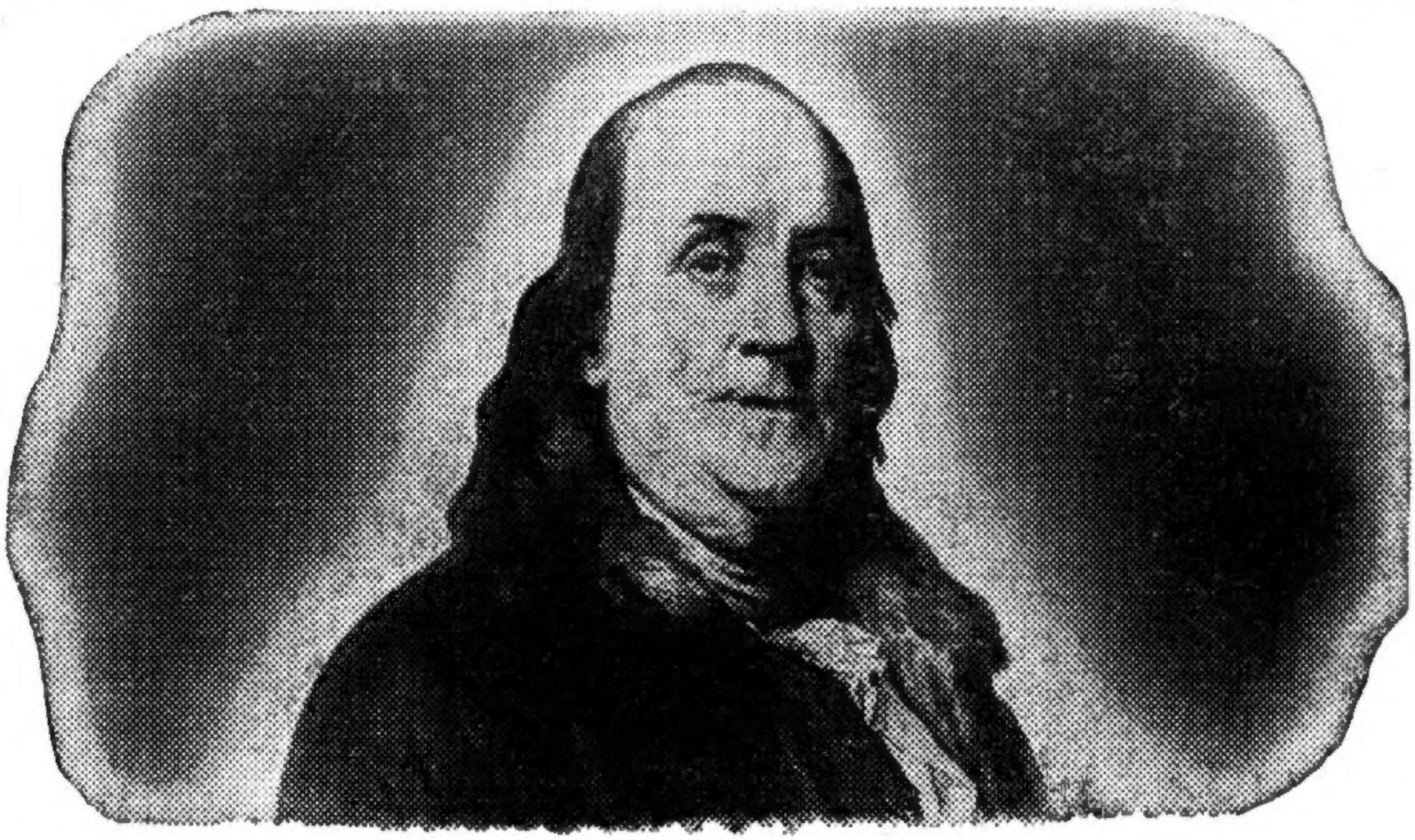
To offset cotton's lack of resiliency, garments have been designed of many thin layers of cloth to trap air between the layers. This is the principle of the Navy's new cold weather suit which looks like a combination coverall and parka and weighs 19 pounds.

The Army took a radical departure. It tried to develop a material which incorporates the dead air spaces within itself, like foam rubber. This turned out to be a foamed vinyl plastic, studded with half-round bumps on the inside to hold it away from the skin and create a secondary air space. Made into jacket and pants and named the "Coldbar" suit, it is worn as underwear. Fantastic properties are claimed for it. Although it is not water-tight in any sense, the Army says it will keep a man warm in icy water. If a soldier falls into a stream or ocean the water will readily enter his clothing and he will feel all that lovely shock of someone slipping an ice cube down his neck. However, the bulky, spongy suit will keep him afloat and in a few minutes the icy water next to his skin will start to feel warm. Presently though quite wet, he will be snug and comfortable.

We are accepting this testimony as hearsay,

(Continued on page 120)

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life! Benjamin Franklin—like many other learned and great men and women—was a Rosicrucian. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) first came to America in 1694. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

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Sniff that Ether Again!

A new theory of electrodynamics stirs the world of science

By GREGG GNARLEN

YOU learned long ago that the theory of an all-pervading, space-filling ether had been discarded. Nowadays, we know that deep space is a vacuum containing scattered particles of cosmic dust and a few stray atoms.

Or do we? Dr. P. A. M. Dirac, famed Nobelist who has done much to create the theoretical world of physics as we know it, has taken a deep breath and thinks that the ether may actually be out there. The distinguished physicist of St. John's College, Cambridge University, has presented his new theory of electrodynamics to the Royal Society—and it will stir the world of science tremendously.

In a letter to the British journal, NATURE, Dr. Dirac says that he has applied quantum mechanics, the mathematical concept of physics which won for him the 1933 Nobel prize, to the ether. In the 1800s, the ether seemed necessary to explain how light and electromagnetic radiation operated. It was supposed to be everywhere in space, and to have a velocity less than that of light. Later, the famous Einstein theory of relativity contradicted this, and when experiments failed to detect its directional effect, the ether theory was discarded.

But now Dr. Dirac explains that the velocity of the ether, like other physical variables in the new physics, is subject to uncertainty relations, and that it is possible to set up what is termed a wave function which makes all values for the velocity of the ether equally probable. And this could represent the perfect vacuum that would dovetail nicely with the theory of relativity!

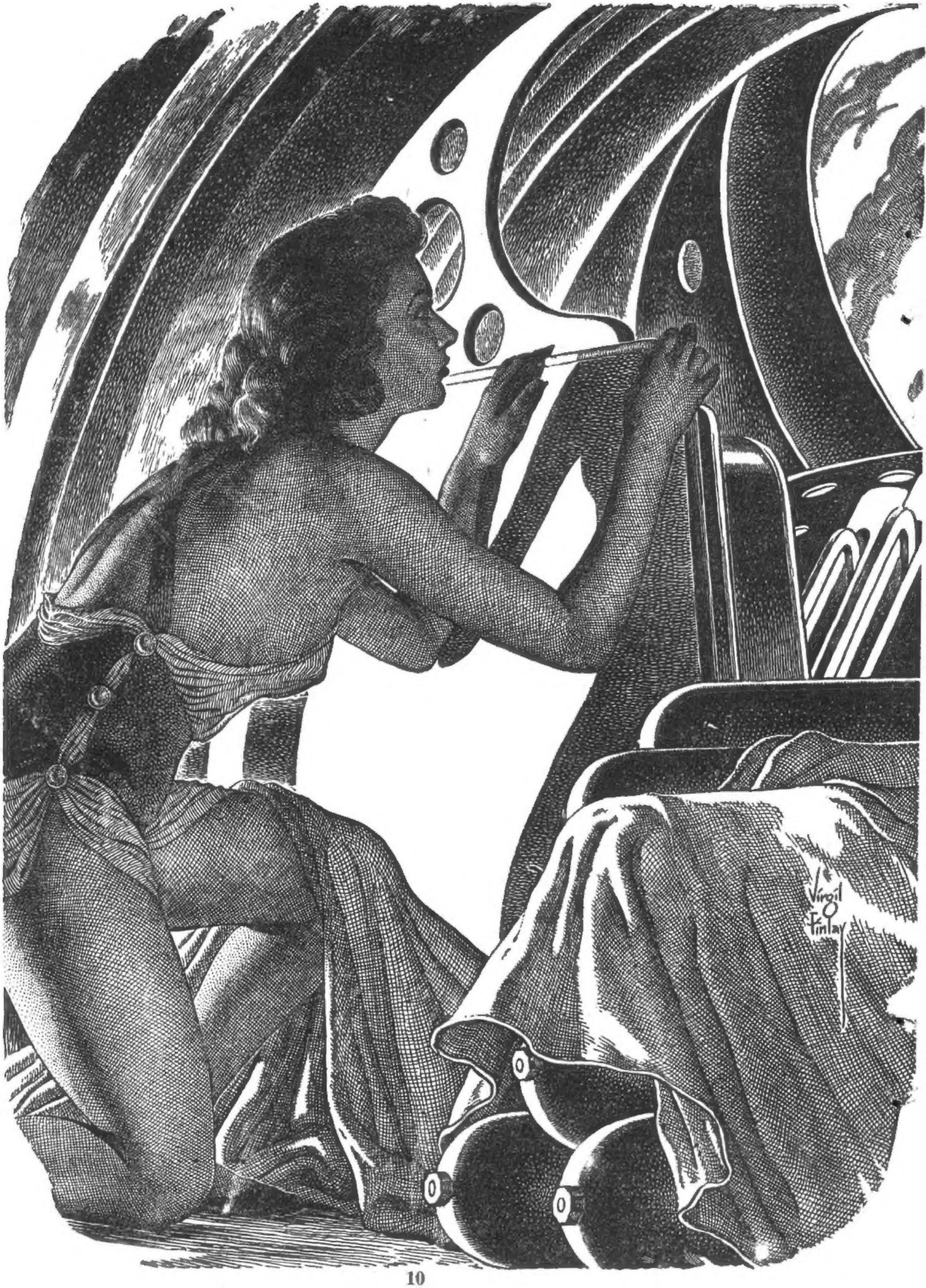
"We may very well have an ether, subject to quantum mechanics and conforming to relativity, provided we are willing to consider the perfect vacuum as an idealized state, not attainable in practice," states Dr. Dirac conservatively.

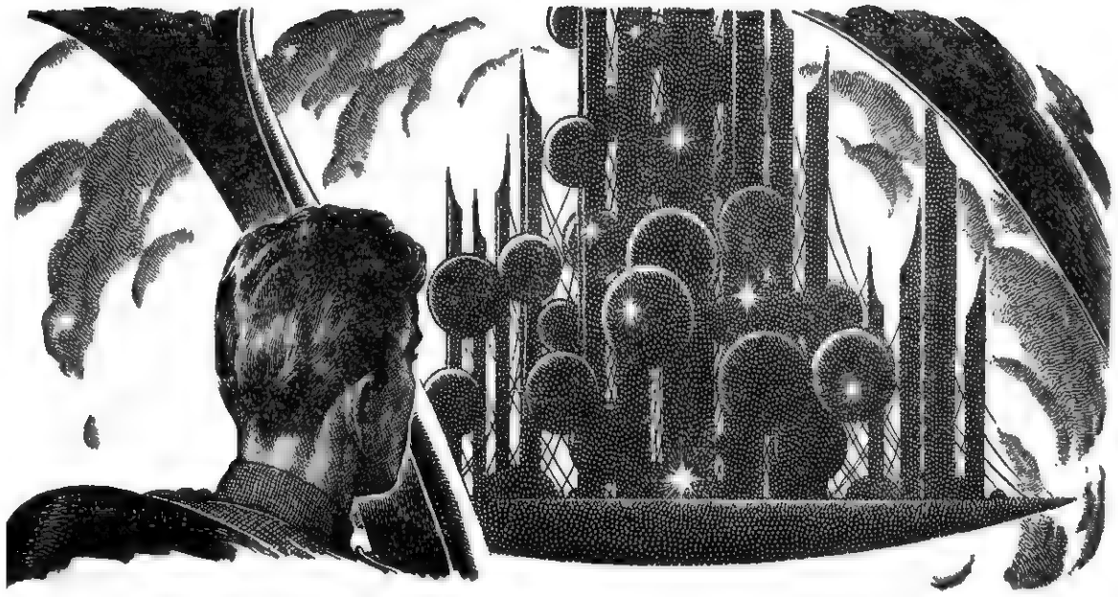
"From the experimental point of view, there does not seem to be any objection to this. We must make some profound alterations in our theoretical ideas of the vacuum. It is no longer a trivial state, but needs elaborate mathematics for its description."

Actually, what is the ether? Dr. Dirac conceives it to be a velocity. But to try to imagine pure velocity is like trying to see motion when there is no tangible object in view to move. We can't see electricity, either, and it is just as hard to visualize what a positive or negative electrical *charge* would look like. The new electrodynamics theory derives a velocity—the same at all points in space-time—with which any electric charge must flow in any given region. And in regions where there is no charge, the *ether is the velocity with which a small charge would have to flow if it were introduced.*

Simple? Anyway, the ether is back with us again, and stolid science is in an uproar.

And when this one dies down there will be another theory to send stolid science into a new uproar.


Virgil Finlay



Island in the Sky

I

IT WAS evening. The toiling gray-clad convicts in the Pit knew, because the guard yelled:

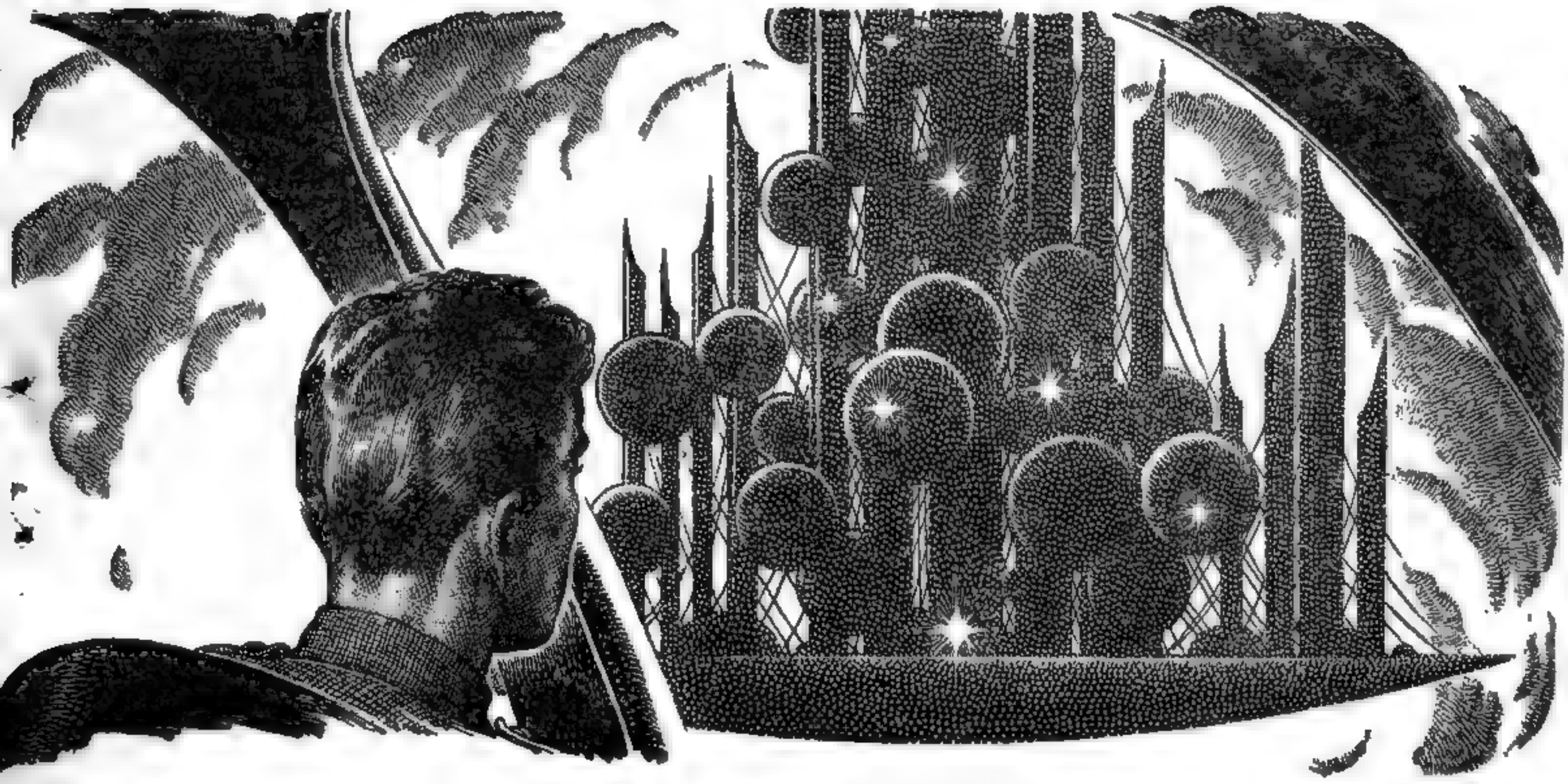
"Down tools! Get to quarters. Chow coming!"

They lined up at attention like old soldiers. All of them were lifers, pallid but beefy from wrestling machines in this atom-smashing plant. Behind them, under stuffy, yellow lights, hummed and droned the great procession of engines. Before them marched

Copyright, 1941, by Better Publications, Inc., and originally published in October, 1941, Thrilling Wonder Stories

A Novel by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

They were smashing more than atoms. They were smashing Earth's final hope for a decent life — and Blackie broke jail to stop it. . . .



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the men of the night shift. The air was heavy. It was bound to be, fifteen miles underground, on the lowest level of the New York City Prison.

The day shift marched into a dark corridor, which was lighted immediately by the glow from their hands and faces. A few years in the atom-smashery gave a ghastly but harmless radiance.

Beyond was the mess hall, where stew and coffee waited, rank with the vitamin concentrates necessary to men who lived and worked fifteen miles from sunlight. Beyond the mess hall stood the rows of cells, each five by seven, with canvas hammocks, barred doors, the odor of insecticide. But at the door to the hall stood a big guard with sergeant's stripes.

"I want Convict Peyton!" he announced. "Number 688-549J!"

The column halted. The lesser guard singled out a man.

"Fall out, Peyton. Rest of you, forward march!"

They filed into the mess hall, leaving the sergeant and one convict alone in the corridor.

Pierce Peyton, alias Blackie, Convict No. 688-549J, was medium-sized and hard-boiled. He wore a dark, bushy beard, covering much of his prison-bleached face. His eyes were bitter and three-cornered, the eyes of a fighter. In his pessimistic soul he looked only for blame and penalization.

"Warden wants to see you up yonder," the sergeant announced.

He led the way along the corridor to a steel panel marked "Decompression Chamber." They went into a metal cubicle. The sergeant turned a dial that made the air hiss out slowly.

"We'll slack pressure for thirty minutes," he said. "Want to take a shower over there in the corner?"

Peyton looked at the shower stall and his eyes glowed. Whatever would happen to him, he would have the luxury of cleanliness. Wisely he refrained from questioning his guide. Throwing off his slouchy gray uniform, he lathered, rinsed and toweled. Stripped, he looked as white as a fish's belly, but tending the levers of the atom-smasher had made him brawny, especially his deltoids and triceps.

THEY left the chamber, went up for some moments in an elevator, then to a higher decompression chamber, a third and a fourth. Here was a chair and a trusty in a white coat.

"Shave Peyton," ordered the sergeant.

The trusty obeyed, also trimming the shaggy black hair with its salting of gray. Still suspicious, Peyton tried not to show how he enjoyed being shaved. His face proved to have a heavy jaw and a tight, scornful mouth. A chin-dimple did a little, not much, to relieve the set savagery of his expression. He hadn't gotten young at atom-smashing since he began—how long ago—twenty years? It seemed a million.

Up through more decompression chambers, to the fifth, sixth and seventh levels. It took time for a man, used to the Pit's compressed atmosphere, to get ready for pressure at sea-level.

At the ninth chamber, another trusty waited with stacks of shirts and socks and several cheap suits. Peyton, neither small nor large, proved easy to fit. He put his feet into rough tan brogans. The sergeant handed him a necktie, which Peyton recognized.

"I wore that the day they slung me in," he said. "Where's the rest of my property?"

"Styles have changed," the sergeant reminded. "This is Nineteen-hundred and Eighty. You've been in for twenty years."

So it *had* been only twenty years! Peyton faced a mirror to knot the necktie. He studied the square, white face, unrecognizable as the boy he had been. . . .

"Don't stand there admiring yourself," snapped the sergeant. "The Old Man's waiting at dawn. We've killed most of the night in these decomps."

They entered more elevators and de-

compression chambers, finally reached the warden's office. It was a business-like room, in which sat a plump blond man behind a heavy desk. He looked up from a big printed paper with a red seal.

"Pierce Peyton," he greeted the convict, "alias Blackie Peyton, about our third or fourth most incorrigible inmate."

Peyton kept silent. Most of the guards called him the worst convict, bar none.

"You came here as a boy of sixteen, sentenced for murder," continued the warden.

Still Peyton made no reply. What good would it do to point out that he had neither touched the gun, nor pulled the trigger? As a foolish orphan kid, falling in with two criminals he thought dashing and indomitable, he had been present at an attempt to rob the payroll of a big factory at home in Rochester. A messenger resisted and was shot. His companions had escaped. Peyton, glued to the spot with terror, was seized by police.

Furious because he bore the blame and punishment for his accomplices, he had rebelled against prison routine, forfeited all privileges.

"You were sent to the lowest level of this prison to help run the atom-smashing machinery that supplies the power essential to civilization. Only at that great depth can the machinery have the proper atmospheric pressure to operate. Law provides that rebellious and dangerous convicts shall serve at the machines. You have smashed atoms almost continuously from Nineteen-hundred and Sixty to Nineteen-hundred and Eighty."

"I know all about it, Warden. You didn't dredge me up out of the Pit just to hear my record."

A harsh smile appeared on the warden's face.

"I want to do you a favor." He consulted his paper. "It seems that three weeks ago, a rookie guard got caught in a roller machine down in the Pit. It got him by the skirt of his tunic and he couldn't reach back and tear loose. He was about to be dragged in and crushed, but you saw and ran to help. You forced the roller jaws apart with your bare hands, a considerable feat of strength—"

PEYTON sneered. So the guard had told, after all! Peyton had acted on impulse in saving that life, but the other incorrigibles in the Pit would have beaten him half to death for helping a hated guard. He had asked the fellow to keep quiet. Apparently the story was out, though. What would happen to him when he got back to the Pit?

"I didn't think," he snarled.

"The whole prison system is grateful to you, Peyton," said the warden.

He handed over the paper. It was a formal order, signed by the Secretary of the State Board of Pardons, for the unconditional release of Pierce Peyton, No. 688-549J, from confinement. Peyton read it through, sat down heavily in an armchair.

"You're free, Peyton," the warden told him. "Going out in the world again."

Out in the world! What was it like, after twenty years? Peyton furrowed his pale brow.

"Things must have changed," he muttered.

"They are, Peyton. Greatly changed in every way." The warden held out his hand. "Take these dark spectacles. You'll need them. Take this, too."

He peeled five bills from a roll of money and wadded them into Peyton's vest pocket. Peyton looked up, still stunned.

"What'll I do out there, Warden? I I was just a kid when I came in. No folks. No money. The only job I know is smashing atoms."

"We've taken care of that, too," soothed the warden, handing him a card. "Take the pneumatic subway just outside the gates. In New York City present yourself at the offices of the Board of Pardons. They have a job for you. Good luck."

He offered his hand. Peyton, brain

whirling, did not notice. He walked blindly through the outer door.

In the closed front yard, a sentry looked at his release order and opened the outer gate. Peyton almost ran out. The Sun was coming up.

"The Sun!" he cried.

He turned his white face to it. The light filled his eyes and he made an agonized grimace. It was as though acid had been thrown in his face. Hurriedly he donned the dark glasses.

A deep, penetrating voice spoke which seemed to come from nearby.

"New York subway here. New York subway here."

Peyton peered about. He saw the source of the voice—an amplifier above a kiosk. He entered.

BLACKIE PEYTON walked into the office of the Pardon Board, just off one of the covered travelways that had been a street in the days when New York consisted of many tall buildings, instead of a single vast one. A trim girl with bleached hair took his card and departed to a rear office. Peyton watched her with interest for he had not seen girls in twenty years. He tried to keep that interest mild. After all, he still had a lot to do before he would be well enough established to pay attention to girls. That must wait.

She returned with a dapper young man with a small, mustache.

"Ah, Peyton!" chirped the man, giving the visitor a limp hand. "We were told to expect you. Everything is arranged. My name is Harrett, assignment supervisor. Sit down." They took seats on opposite sides of a dark-painted table. "I understand you've worked with machinery."

Peyton removed his dark glasses, blinked in the subdued light.

"Yes, in the atom-smashery," he replied.

"The atom-sm—oh, dear, dear!" The news seemed to distress Harrett. He fiddled with his mustache. "That *is* awkward."

"Awkward?" repeated Peyton, mystified. "Why? I was a good hand."

Apparently this statement made it more awkward still.

"You see, Peyton, the atomic power you have worked with is a—eh—a Government monoply. Knowledge of its production is withheld by law from the public. Do you—uh—understand the production?"

"In a general way. I worked the machines, sometimes helped treat the minerals they mined in the Pit, or made the little containers out of inerton."

"Say no more, Peyton," Harrett actually begged. "You have been too long in—eh—confinement. You do not know, I am afraid, what things it is dangerous to discuss. Now about work for you, I have decided to send you to the mines just north of—"

"Mines? Look, Mr. Harrett, if it's all the same to you, I've lived underground long enough. I'd like to be outside."

"Please," Harrett said. "It is my place to assign you where I think you would fit in best."

"Haven't I anything to say about it?"

"You are being unreasonable, Peyton. This board wants to give you a chance at rehabilitation—"

"Who asked you to be my stepfather?" Peyton pushed back his chair. "I can take care of myself. Rehabilitate somebody else!"

"No!" Harrett rose flutteringly. "You cannot go out like that."

"Can't I?"

"You are an ex-convict, without means of support," chattered Harrett. "If you are set free in this community, you will undoubtedly go back to criminal ways. Stop, Peyton! Don't leave this place!"

As Harrett's voice rose, a side door opened and in stepped a plump, coarse-looking man in a neat blue uniform.

"Arrest this man!" Harrett commanded.

Peyton kicked the table out of his way, raced up to the uniformed man, hit him six times in the face and body within

the space of four seconds. At the fifth wallop, the heavy body began to wilt. At the sixth, it collapsed awkwardly. The bleached girl had also come back into the room behind the railing. She screamed tremulously. Harrett sprang at a desk that was studded all over with push-buttons, but Peyton got there first.

"Sit down, cutie," he ordered Harrett. "That's right. Now, if you move before I'm out of here, I'll stretch you on the floor beside that tub of lard you sicked on me."

Harrett seemed frozen to his chair. As swiftly as he had moved when attacking, Peyton rushed to the outer door, through it and into the maze of ceilings, arcades, cubicles and tunnels that made up New York City of 1980.

As he fled, he breathed fiercely, his mind in a turmoil. Hadn't he been set free by the warden? What was this trick they'd tried to play on him, practically sentencing him to another kind of hard labor? What had happened to the world he had known twenty years before.

II

THE subway had dropped Peyton at the door of the big building which housed the Pardon Board's office. Eagerly he had hurried to ask for the promised job. Now, panting with fierce anger, his knuckles still tingling with the impact of the blows he had struck, he emerged and took his first look at the public street.

It was really a passage. Yards wide, apparently miles long, it was sleekly walled and solidly roofed. Glaringly lighted by immense frosted globes. On either side ran a wide walk, thronged with people. In the center were four lanes of traffic. The automobiles were smaller than the models Peyton remembered and tended toward an olive shape. They were painted brightly. Most of them were delivery vehicles. None gave off any odor or made a noise louder than a hum. "I'd like to have one of those," thought Peyton.

He started. The air was filled with a shouted command.

"Chew Cardomint! Chew Cardomint!" This was the advertising of the Nineteen-hundred and Eighties. There were no large printed signs, neon or bulb-studded, such as he had known. The appeal was to the ear. He walked a block, crossed the street on an overpass. Another advertizing voice dinned: *"You need Wake-ups!"*

But under this, like an obbligato, the nearer shops had their own amplified messages: *"Drink Limex—perk up! It's better at Brummagem's! Hurry-Rub for the hair!"*

"What now?" Peyton was wondering. This squabble at the Pardon Board had thrown him out of his one chance at employment. He must think about getting to Rochester, where he had lived. He might find some friend of his dead father who would help him. First of all, however, he needed food. He hadn't eaten since yesterday. He stopped before a modest window in which a white-capped man fried pancakes.

"Eat cheap!" bade a speaker horn above the door. *"Eat cheap!"*

Peyton went in. At a counter of gleaming black sat four men on stools, eating.

Peyton saw no menu card, but another loudspeaker was babbling:

"Pancakes, eggs, ham, bacon, oatmeal—"

"Give me some of those griddle cakes," Peyton told the counter man. "Ham and eggs. Coffee."

"No coffee," the man told him, plainly surprised at having to give this information. "You want Cafeno? Dixie Blen? Brazillo?"

"Whichever tastes the most like coffee."

The food arrived promptly, plates riding on conveyor belts behind the counter. Peyton ate and drank with relish, making only a slight grimace at the coffee substitute. The menu babble

died abruptly and a crisp, cultured voice announced:

"Attention, New York, this is the Flying Island!"

Peyton looked up. A rectangle had lighted up behind the counter—television, better than he had known in 1960. It reflected in bright colors the image of a man in khaki uniform and visored cap, wearing monocle and a superior smile.

"Attention!" the image said again. "Message from Marshal Torridge. Important!"

The face changed. The new figure was half-length, an elegant person in blue and gold uniform, with the delicate features and lofty air of royalty.

"Citizens of New York," came a slow, deep voice. "I, as Marshal of the Airmen, here and now appoint a new administrator for you. General D. D. Argyle will immediately assume command of all bureaus and departments. . . ."

"What's all this about?" Peyton asked his nearest neighbor, who stared in utter astonishment at such ignorance.

"And now," the figure called Marshal Torridge was saying, "we shall demonstrate the might of the Airmen!"

SUDDENLY the screen filled with gleaming, speeding aircraft, lean and deadly as torpedoes. They were maneuvering against a brilliant noonday sky, which gave them a blinding silvery sheen. The view faded into a glimpse of uniformed men, drawn up like a line of soldiers, handling rifle-like weapons. Then there was a blare of music and finally Marshal Torridge returned.

"That is all," he said. "Do your duty as citizens of New York."

The screen darkened. Peyton, who had understood little or nothing, drew out money to pay for his breakfast. He stared at the bills the warden had given him. Each was for a thousand dollars.

"Five grand!" he whispered. He faltered to the counter man: "The smallest I've got is a—a thousand dollar bill—"

"Okay," grunted the counterman, unimpressed. He handed back a smaller green bill marked "Five Hundred," and a disk of metal stamped "$100." Peyton studied them in mystification, then in suspicion.

"Is this all I get?" he demanded.

The counterman pointed to the empty dishes.

"Cakes, hundred-fifty. Eggs and ham, two hundred. Cafeno, fifty. Four hundred from one thousand leaves six hundred." He glared. "What do you expect for four hundred smackos—the Ritz?"

"Look, I'm just a stranger," Peyton said. "I'm not up on this. Is money so cheap?"

Other customers volunteered information; four hundred dollars for a hearty breakfast was most reasonable, they said. Peyton shrugged, thrust his money carelessly into a trousers pocket. Feeling no more awe for his thousand-dollar bills, he went outside.

A big rectangle of parklike lawn was open between lofty walls and roof-levels to the cloudless sky. Trees and shrubs grew in thickets throughout. Peyton found a bench near a central pool and sat down. His eyes behind dark spectacles were puzzled.

He had been in New York for six hours, and it was more than he could understand. Tiers, galleries, arcades, halls, shouted advertisements, speeding silent vehicles, strange folk who knew all about it while he knew nothing. . . the warden had been right, but not helpful, when he said that everything was changed.

Who was going to help him? Peyton shook his head.

Someone sat down at the other end of the bench. The newcomer was a lean, ragged man with gray whiskers and a wrinkled, rosy face. His old eyes were bright and humorus. Peyton studied the face, liked it. He had an inspiration.

"Want to earn some money?" he asked.

The old man turned toward him.

"Doing what?"

Peyton drew out his little roll of bills and detached a thousand-dollar note.

Peyton clung to the rising cylinder with all his strength

"Take this and tell me all you know about what has happened in the last twenty years."

But the old man made no move to accept.

"What's happened to what?"

"Everything," Peyton said, and thrust the bill into the thin hand. He puzzled over an explanation, decided to tell the simple truth. "I've been in prison since the fall of Nineteen-Sixty. I'm out today.

"Congrats."

"Thanks. Begin with Nineteen-Sixty. The Third World War broke out just when I was put away. Who won?"

"Nobody," the old man replied. "It lasted about a year. Fleets sunk, armies shot to hash. Only the air forces came through it and they kept busy bombing each other's towns, like throwing stones at each other's kid brothers. Not many kid brothers left by summer of Nineteen-Sixty-one." He pushed the bill back. "Keep it. I've eaten today."

"So the war burned itself out?"

The gray head nodded. "When the air forces had bombed everything to pieces, they were all that was left. So they made peace. They were running things on both sides, anyway. They still do."

Peyton remembered scraps of the television broadcast.

"How can an air force run things?"

"I'll try to make it simple, Mr.—"

"Blackie Peyton."

"I'm Joe Hooker. They call me Gramp, though I never had a family. Yes, the Airman were left to build the world again. Everything was killed or burnt or blasted. New York is all new, you see."

"Yes, it's not like I remember it," confessed Peyton. "And my home town, Rochester, probably has changed, too."

Gramp snorted. "There ain't no Rochester, no Schenectady, no Albany! All bombed to flinders. Nothing but woods and wreckage today. Hardly anybody lived through it and all who did gathered at the big towns."

Peyton felt a chill. Rochester gone, destroyed, grown over with wildness! His faint hope of finding his former friends simply vanished.

"Open country's gone back to the Indians," Gramp Hooker continued. "Only there ain't any Indians. I've heard tell there's a Philadelphia somewhere, like this place, but I can't say for sure."

"You can't say about Philadelphia? Why not? Don't New Yorkers know anything except New York? That sounds—"

"Wait, wait!" interposed Hooker. "Let me back up to where I told about the Airmen building and running things. Around the world, as I get it, there's a string of cities. New York, London, Berlin, Moscow, Tokyo, Frisco, Chicago, and places along that zone. They were built by the Airmen, or rather the Airmen made the people that were left build them. Here and there, to north and south, are other big centers, though I can't say where, or what names they have. I suppose they're mostly like this place.

"New York's a great, big heap, all sorts of buildings and tunnels and spaces jammed together. Quarter-mile high, five or six miles square. There are holes in it down to ground-level, like this park, so we can get some light and air if we come after them. But mostly it's tiers of shops and offices and dormitories and such. Outside is a bunch of fields and farms, run by the city to feed us. Factories right in the city. Used to be mines, but they dig next to town, miles deep."

"I know," said Peyton. "I've been down there."

There was silence again. From the nearest high wall came a distant but audible voice, extolling the desirability of a synthetic tobacco.

"What's happened to billboards?" asked Peyton.

"Not many folks read these days. Only old coots like me. It's well—out of fashion, so the ads are yammered out, not printed. You'll get used to it."

"I wonder," muttered Peyton.

Gramp shook his head and continued. "We farm and mine and do other things close by. Not much trade or travel. Country a little way off is gone back to the forest. Trees and brush grown up where there used to be towns and farms. And animals—lots of bears, for instance—track down from the Adirondacks. Quite a few generations of bears can grow up in twenty years.

"Also what some folks call wolves, but I figure they're just dogs, forgotten and run wild. There must be good hunting, if a fellow had a gun."

He looked wistful. "Guns ain't allowed, though."

"Nor real coffee," added Peyton with equal longing. "I'll bet the Airmen have real coffee and guns, too."

"I suppose so," agreed Gramp. "We can't be too sure about them, or the other towns, only what they want to tell us. And speaking of the Airmen, here they come."

It was almost exactly noon, but a shadow fell across the bright park.

Peyton saw the sun disappear behind something that blotted the sky. Night-like gloom fell, stars appeared. Then the thing moved past the sun and away toward the horizon.

"That," said Gramp, "is the Flying Island."

"But what is it?" Peyton blurted.

"What I said. A flying island, a mile across. It stays up there, twelve or fifteen miles, keeps neck and neck with the sun. In this part of the world, that takes about seven hundred miles an hour. The Airmen live on it and it's always noon for them. They keep tab on the whole world, sliding over every city once a day."

"They've got that thing forever flying, with the world spinning down below, and all the guns and airplanes and atomic power?"

"Better not talk about atomics," warned Gramp. "It's their favorite taboo. We ain't only not supposed to use it, but we ain't even supposed to think about it."

Peyton remembered the agitation of Harrett at the office of the Pardon Board, decided to drop the subject immediately.

"Does anybody know why the Airmen take all that trouble to keep that thing going?"

"To keep watch on their ring of cities, naturally. The cities feed them and furnish them and pay taxes and entertain them—"

"Entertain them?"

"Sure, at the circuses up on the roof of the town. Everyone goes—Airmen, ground men, rich and poor. It's a public works. People wouldn't know what to do without a circus once a week."

"I'm going up to the Flying Island some day," Peyton muttered.

"Nobody ever goes up there but Airmen," Hooker snorted. "It's fifteen miles up, I tell you, right in the stratosphere."

Fifteen miles up. Peyton turned the words over in his mind. That was a long climb, but he had made it from underground. He could make it from the surface. Suddenly he felt as if he had a purpose in life—to set foot on the Flying Island that circled the globe.

"If you won't take my money," he said, "let me buy us some lunch."

"How much you got, Blackie? Four thousand six hundred? It won't last you a week. Better make it just a sandwich. Tonight I'll show you a place where you can sleep for only two hundred."

Peyton stood up and followed him, but he could not forget the black, powerful blotch which was flying steadily above the lofty battlements of New York.

III

THE flop-room was as long as a riding gallery and as narrow as a sidewalk. Once it had been a public alleyway.

Now, walled fore and aft, it was furnished with a front office and a lengthy row of open stalls, each containing a cot. Many were occupied by grubby, seedy men. Only one small light glowed near the office.

"I've slept in worse than this," said Peyton as they entered. He remembered the tiny, stuffy cells in the Pit, barred and reeking of disinfectant. "What are you staring at me like that for?"

"You sort of give off light," remarked Gramp.

"Sure," said Peyton. "That's Pit glow. You pick it up smashing atoms."

"Shut up, I want to sleep!" growled the occupant of a nearby cot.

The pair sought adjoining stalls. Peyton removed his shoes and stretched out on the blankets. Gazing up through the dimness, he reviewed his first day of freedom.

The newness of the world was too much for him to straighten out now. More important, probably, was the fact that he was down to first principles. No job, no prospects, mighty little money. Four hundred for breakfast, two hundred for sandwiches, two hundred more for this lodging. That left him forty-two hundred dollars, which might or might not keep body and soul together for five days. Then what? Where and how could a friendless ex-convict hope for help or comfort?

Then, unbidden, came a vision. It was as if the many ceilings slid away from above him and the noonday sun arose. High above in the heaven soared the Flying Island, from which the world's rulers had broadcast that morning and of which Gramp had told him something. There was a goal, the Flying Island!

I'm going to get up there, he swore to himself. There must be a way. . . .

TWO hours later, crashes and clamors rent the quiet. Peyton awoke and sat up. Other occupants of the flop-room ran by the open front of his stall. "Airmen!" cried one. "A grab gang!"

They scampered toward the back of the long chamber. He jammed his feet into his shoes and came to the front of the stall. Gramp was there, caught him by the hair.

"C'mon, Blackie, I waited—skip it. Too late."

The front door had been kicked in. Men, flashing electric torches, surrounded them. There were six, in khaki-colored tunics, flaring breeches, gleaming boots. Each wore a leather helmet with flaps over the ears and goggles pushed up on the brow. They carried pistols. Their faces were clean, handsome and sneering.

"Well, two of you didn't run," said the tallest man, who seemed to be a leader. "We want men who won't run. Argyle took command today and he wants to run a great show next week."

"Why should I run?" Peyton demanded. "You don't scare me."

"Identification folders," ordered the leader. Gramp produced a doubled piece of card from inside his threadbare coat. The leader studied it. "Huh—charity case, daily dole of five hundred dollars. We can take you. Anybody not in useful or gainful employment can be drafted for public works, and the circus is public works." He turned to Peyton. "Where is your folder?"

"If I had one, I wouldn't give it to you," Peyton snapped.

"He doesn't understand," interposed Gramp. "He's just out of—"

"Shut up!" rapped the leader. "Even if you had a folder, you can't have much of a job, bunking down here. Not useful or gainful, anyway. And you look like a fighting man to me."

Peyton hunched his shoulders. In the light of the torches, his skin was not glowing. His dark eyes returned the other's gaze levelly.

"I am a fighting man," he said. "Try something. You'll find out."

"Stand easy!" warned the other sharply. "Try any violence and you won't live long enough to regret it. I'm an Airman, you stupid fool."

"Yeah?" said Peyton, unimpressed. "I kind of thought so."

The leader of the Airmen jerked his leather-sheathed head.

"We're a special detail. General Argyle needs chopping blocks for the circus fighters. Come along, both of you." He pointed. "There's an elevator just outside."

Peyton, emerging from the elevator kiosk under guard, found himself in a park under a starry sky. Lawns, thickets, flower-beds, fountains, noisy open-air theaters and game establishments. It seemed similar to other public resorts in the days he had known. Then he realized that all this was flourishing upon a vast roof expanse of the city, miles square and at least a quarter of a mile above ground-level.

"All the closer to the Flying Island," came a satisfying reflection.

Even without a moon, myriad illuminations made the area as bright as day. Gramp, marching beside Peyton, explained that here the rich of New York spent their considerable leisure time.

"There are rich people besides Airmen?" asked Peyton.

"Sure. Even Airmen have relatives. Look, there's the circus."

They crossed a lawn to approach a great, squat cylinder of steel and plastic, fully five hundred yards in diameter, and jutting eighty yards upward from the roof level.

"Inside it's all a slope," explained Gramp, "with a flat arena in the center, like a crater on the Moon."

They were brought to a door in the cylinder and led into chambers beneath the inner slope. Inside a metal-lined vestibule, the guards met other Airmen.

"Any luck?" the leader inquired. "We found nobody. They ran for their holes like mice. They'd rather watch the show than work in it."

"We got two." The leader of Peyton's captors jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "One's old, but he's still got fire in his eye. Might make sport for a little while. The other'll make more than that."

"Try me," invited Peyton with grim eagerness. "Any of you, bare-handed. Make it any two of you!"

"See?" cried his captor, as though Peyton's challenge gave him the utmost pleasure.

They went into a big enclosure beyond. It smelled like a gymnasium. Two-thirds of its floor was covered with sawdust. Against the wall near the door were attached a set of chestweights and with these a tall, rugged young man was working. An Airman of about forty, smoking a cigarette in a long holder, and a dazzling young woman, watched the muscleplay of the athlete's arms and back. "We found these, sir," said Peyton's captor, saluting. "One of them looks usable."

AT HIS words, the older Airman removed the cigarette holder from between his lips and faced Peyton. He had a brown, rectangular face with a mustache the color of ginger. His uniform was of expensive fabric and braided with gold at cuffs and shoulders.

"He looks savage enough," he observed. "Don't you think so, Archbold?"

The tall young man turned from his chest-weights.

"A little short and compact, but tough and probably active," he diagnosed with the air of an expert.

Peyton paid no attention to this appraisal of himself, for he had taken time to look at the girl. He forgot that less than twenty-four hours ago he had decided to keep his mind off women. Here was a glorious blonde, ten years younger than he. Her carefully arranged curls gleamed as with frost and her face was also as pallid as Peyton's. Her cheekbones were high. The corners of her green eyes lifted ever so slightly. Her nose and mouth were short and well shaped. A sheathlike dress of bright blue cloth hugged her slim body. She looked like a high-bred, dangerous cat. . . .

"Well," she said to him, "now that you've had a look at me, how do you like me? What's your name?"

"Blackie Peyton," he said. "And as for how I like you—I do."

Given a moment, he would be able to forget that he had been brought into her presence as a captive, but the moment was not to be had. The Airman with the gold braid struck at him with an open palm. Peyton ducked under the blow, set himself to hit back. Other Airmen swarmed upon him, pinioning his arms.

"Don't hurt him!" the athlete Archbold said quickly. "He's a fighter. I want to work out with him."

"Suits me," snarled Peyton.

They pushed him to the edge of the sawdust space. From a side door came a burly Negro in trunks and sandals. He was as brown-black as a seal, with a broad, gentle face.

"You let Willie look after you," he said.

With deft hands he removed Peyton's jacket, shirt and undershirt. Meanwhile, Archbold had departed briefly and come back with an armful of clanking metal. He donned a helmet with a visor, a rigid breastplace with chain mail sleeves and brass greaves over his shins.

Peyton had a premonition of bizarre peril. Hadn't they talked about fighting? Didn't that mean boxing?

Archbold had taken up a round shield and a lean, straight sword with a cross-hilt. The forward edge of the sword was rounded and dull, the back sharpened.

"Here, mister."

The big Negro was giving Peyton a similar shield and a sword that was dull on both edges. As Peyton took them, another Airman entered, wearing a badge marked "Police." He pointed at Peyton.

"I want that man," he declared. "He refused assignment to work at the Pardon Board's offices, assaulted a guard—" Then the policeman saw the gold-braided Airman and stiffened to salute. "General Argyle!"

Peyton also looked. So that was Argyle, the man named over the television as governor-chief of New York, who had been kidnaping poor men to use in a circus!

"Wait a second and see some fun," Argyle said. "I'm going to let my star gladiator sweat a bit. Peyton will be his partner. You can take your man later."

Peyton looked again at his opponent, armed with sword and shield. Abruptly it grew clear in his brain. The circus about which everyone talked was the same sort that had been popular in ancient Rome—with swords, blood and death!

"I never shied off from trouble yet," he said to the gladiator. "Come on, let's get busy."

"Good," came the muffled voice of Archbold from behind his visor.

HE FELL into a stiff-seeming fencing pose, then licked his sword out. It stung Peyton's cheek.

"One!" counted an Airman.

Archbold was back on guard, fobbing off Peyton's clumsy and fumbling return.

"Fight him, Blackie!" squealed Gramp.

Archbold made another smooth-cutting gesture. A sound like a whip-stroke, and Peyton stepped away with another welt, this time on his sword-wrist. The big Negro made a sympathetic clucking sound.

"Two!" counted Argyle. "You're splendid today, Archbold!"

"I'm beginning to get the idea," Peyton snarled at his opponent. "Maybe I won't be so easy from now on."

Archbold struck.

"Three!" Argyle counted automatically, and then said hurriedly, "No! What's the idea, Archbold? Don't let him beat you!"

Peyton had interposed his shield, caught Archbold's blade within inches of his welted cheek and struck in return. The blow made a ringing sound on the mail of Archbold's right biceps. Before

the gladiator could whip his sword back, Peyton dashed the metal shield-face hard against Archbold's visored head. Back jerked the helmet and Archbold's sword flew from his hand.

Peyton dropped his own weapons, struck with both fists, swore as his knuckles bruised on the armor. Archbold tried to club him with the shield edge, but Peyton slipped in close, caught the gladiator around the waist. With a quick twist of his heel behind Archbold's calf, he threw the gladiator heavily.

"Get them apart!" called someone shrilly.

But Peyton had already torn the visor up and was smashing Archbold's distorted features with piston-quick jabs of his right fist. By the time the Airmen had run in and seized him, he had worked both hands up under Archbold's gorget and fastened on the throat beneath it. Archbold made a gobbling sound, then no sound at all came from his prostrate figure.

Dragging with all their strength, the Airmen tore Peyton clear. The tall, armored figure of Archbold lay silent where it had fallen. Willie, the Negro, picked it up and propped it against the wall.

"Bring water," he said anxiously. "Mister Archbold's bad hurt."

The gladiator recovered slowly. His first wild glance was full of terror.

"Keep him away!" he mumbled hoarsely. "He'll kill me!"

"He ought to kill you," growled Argyle. "Get that armor off, Archbold, and go back to your delivery truck. You're through."

The policeman moved purposefully toward Peyton.

"Shall I take this man now, General?"

"You will *not!*" snapped Argyle pettishly. "Take your orders back to Headquarters and say that General Argyle countermands them. This man Peyton's pure poison, and he won't be sent away to rot. I'm going to make a star gladiator out of him!"

IV

A LITTLE room off the gymnasium was fitted with a cot, a surgical chair, shelves of instruments and medical supplies. Peyton leaned against the wall, his pale face counterfeiting boredom as the Negro put neat stitches across a gash in his ribs. Gramp sat in a corner, watching.

"I still don't remember getting that cut," said Peyton.

"Mister Archbold flung his sword and the back was sharp," explained the Negro. "You're lucky you finished him so quick, Mister Blackie."

"Drop the 'mister.' I'm just Blackie Peyton. I always try to finish them quick. What did that fool Argyle mean when he said he'd make a star gladiator out of me?"

"He meant business, and he's no fool. General Argyle is lots of things, but you'd never call him a fool."

"I've heard of him," seconded Gramp. "He's foolish like an old gray wolf. They say he may be the boss Airman some day, instead of only over New York. Blackie, I never seen anybody as good at assault and battery as you. You'll make a great gladiator."

"What did you say your name was?" Peyton asked the Negro.

"Willie Burgoyne."

"You ought to be a good gladiator yourself, Willie. You're quite a hunk of man."

For the first time Willie Burgoyne's sepia face did not look gentle.

"General Argyle started to train me, but I said I wouldn't fight any man unless I was mad at him."

It sounded strange to Peyton. He mused while Willie put some adhesive over the wound. A gladiator could be famous, popular. It might be a step toward the Flying Island, where he had made up his mind to go.

"I feel different," he said. "I'll fight anybody who craves action. But this Argyle acts like he's used to being obeyed. What happened when you gave

him that argument?"

"He slung me into a show, with a grass skirt and a spear, to fight a lion."

Gramp whistled. "I seen it from the public bleachers. Argyle was only circus chief then, ranking colonel. He was fixing for you to be killed, eh? But you killed the lion instead."

"Yes," Willie admitted modestly. "Since then they've used me against a lot of animals, but no men. I stick to that. Stand easy, Mister Blackie. You'll be all right in a few days."

Peyton wriggled gingerly into his shirt.

"Cut out the 'mister.' Gramp, you didn't tell me everything. You didn't say much about the Airmen, and nothing at all about the circus."

Gramp had found some medicinal liquor in a bottle. He poured drinks into three beakers.

"Drink up," he invited. "Blackie, the circus is rough stuff. Man against man, man against beast, single or in gangs. Lots of blood, plenty of deaths. Nothing like when you were a kid—box-fights, wrestling matches."

"It may be like this," put in Willie's soft voice. "Things don't always please folks. They crave action. Maybe they get it by watching circus fighters."

"Sure," agreed Peyton. "That was the Roman idea. Bread and circuses when the people got jumpy or questioning. Sounds as if the Airmen had trouble with the ground people and had to give 'em shows to sweeten 'em up."

"If General Argyle heard you talk like that—" began Gramp.

"You call Argyle a general, but I heard about somebody called Marshal Torridge," said Peyton.

"He's the boss Airman, never comes down off that Flying Island. There's lots of generals—one, I guess, for every city. Every Airman, as soon as he's born, ranks a captain. He grows up and he's a major or a colonel. Military rule."

ONCE more the Flying Island soared into Peyton's mind. "This Flying Island their home?" he asked.

"Headquarters," Gramp replied, "the place that keeps watch over the world. Most of the Airmen are governing the cities, the way I hear it. Don't ask me any more of what goes on up on the Flying Island. Airmen don't confide in me."

"They don't confide in anybody," added Willie. "All we folks on the ground do is obey orders, give them what they need to live like kings, salute them when they notice us. You make 'em mad, Mister Blackie, when you don't do that." He looked grim. "Takes a lot of salutes to satisfy twenty thousand Airmen."

Peyton stopped knotting his necktie.

"Twenty thousand?" he repeated. "There must be millions of ordinary people in this town, and millions more in the others. That's enough to swallow twenty thousand for breakfast and stop all the salutes and circuses."

"Not when the twenty thousand have all the guns and planes," Gramp reminded him.

The door opened before Peyton could think of a reply. General Argyle came in. The blonde girl looked over his shoulder.

"How is he?" Argyle asked Willie.

The great black body straightened. A broad hand flashed upward in salute.

"He'll be well in a week, General."

"Ready for circus after next," decided Argyle. "Come along, Peyton. There's a tailor waiting to see you."

"Tailor?" echoed Peyton, not understanding.

He followed the general to another room and understood still less as a deft, soft man measured him quickly and promised delivery by nightfall of several suits of clothes.

"What is this?" Peyton protested to the general. "I didn't order any clothes and I haven't much money."

"Leave that to me," Argyle told him. "I can't have you looking like a tramp."

He was the man who had sent away a policeman pursuing Peyton, who would give him work, clothes, money and fame,

might even get him to the Flying Island, yet Peyton could not like him.

"What do you care how I look?" Peyton challenged bluntly.

Argyle said nothing. The girl smiled tigerishly and went to a radio that was set flush in the wall, like a safe. She twisted a dial.

"It's all over town, folks," a newscasting voice snapped, "the treat that's coming when General Argyle celebrates his New York promotion at the circus next week! Seems he's been training a surprise scrapper in secret. Blackie Peyton's the name, and they say you'll all be knowing it. In a private tryout, he mopped up 'Slasher' Archbold, put him clear out of the circus business—"

She turned it off. "You're a celebrity now, Blackie," she said.

He nodded dumbly. They were giving him a build-up, but could he make good on it?

"Publicity's already started," General Argyle amplified. "You've got to be seen in public, too. I'm taking you out tonight when your new clothes arrive—you and Thora here."

"You?"

Peyton turned and looked at the blonde. She smiled.

"Certainly. I'm here to help make you a public personality. I used to be seen with Archbold and did him justice. Now I'll be seen with you. Strictly business."

"What else would it be but strictly business?" Argyle demanded.

An inverted smile crinkled Peyton's rocklike face.

"Sure, what else?" he agreed coldly.

THE pleasure garden called Brockenburg's was not greatly different from the night clubs of twenty years before. Its vogue was in great part due to its recapturing of an archaic flavor. Tables and chairs had silver-surfaced legs of iron, seats and tops of red and green enamel. There was a bar of imitation mahogany, behind which stood bartenders in old-fashioned white coats, with hair clipped close to their temples and slicked down on top.

Behind the bar was a mirror, against which stood shelves and shelves of bottles. The bottles and the imitation beer pumps, however, were only for show. Drinks, as ordered, were whipped along on conveyor belts just under the bar.

In a cleared space among the tables cavorted a dancing chorus of girls. A singer heartily bawled out a rendition of "Begin the Beguine," one of the best of the old songs. Its pumped-up avowals of passion were hailed as screamingly funny by the audience.

At a choice table, near the music and the entertainment, sat General Argyle, resplendent in a white-and-gold uniform. He wore a monocle and a platinum bracelet. Numerous persons, city-dwellers in evening attire and lesser Airmen in uniform, came to pay him flattering court.

"Meet Blackie Peyton," he kept saying, gesturing toward his companion, a heavy-jawed, pallid man in beautifully fitting dinner clothes of midnight blue. "Greatest natural killer in history. See him week after next at the circus. He'll dazzle you."

Peyton greeted stranger after stranger with his best pretense of cordiality.

"Glad to meet you. Thanks for coming over."

Thora, the blonde, smiled above a fan of blue spun glass during a visitorless interlude.

"I must say that you act quite like a gentleman, after all," she told Peyton.

"I was always a good actor," he replied, "but don't be deceived.

She seemed to like that.

The singer and the dancers made their exit. Music began—drums and wooden pipes that squealed like captive elephants. A door opened and great green shapes came springing through. Peyton stared, half-fascinated and disgusted.

"Those *are* frogs," Thora informed him, as if reading his mind.

"They're as big as men!" he protested.

"Yes, and almost as smart. Scientists —Airmen have endowed plenty of them —did it with natural selection, growth rays, environment. Quite successful."

A trainer appeared, cracking a whip. The frogs hopped over each other, wrestled clumsily, finally croaked out a semi-tuneful chorus of "Oh, Susanna." Peyton scowled, revolted by all this trouble to furnish trick animals, when real tobacco and coffee were not to be had. Well, he reflected, entertainment was something the Airmen insisted on. Grim entertainment was furnishing him with a living, keeping him out of police hands, might elevate him at last to the Flying Island. Meanwhile, Thora sat beside him.

"How about a flight over the city?" Argyle asked them.

Thora smiled politely. Peyton nodded, trying to disguise his thrilled anticipation.

LEAVING Brockenburg's, they walked through gravel-pathed shrubbery to a landing field surfaced in concrete. From a cubicle hangar, attendants pushed a plane. It was a winged torpedo, no more than twelve feet long and three in diameter. Two seats rode midway in the metal fusilage, one up by the controls.

"I'll be operating," Argyle informed Peyton and Thora as he arranged a dome of glass to cover them. "I must order you to keep your eyes on the view. It's interesting. Besides, only Airmen are to have anything to do with aircraft operation. Is that clear, Peyton?"

"Yes, sir."

Argyle went to his controls. The atomic motor hissed gently. They soared upward like a skyward shell. The full moon had suddenly come up. They rose as if to meet it.

Below them, the city of New York resembled a single, rambling house with many lean-tos, annexes and ells. In the upper levels it was partially open here and there, revealing bits of travelways and squares. Lighted ports and windows showed on the outer walls. The parks of the vast roof gleamed with many jewel lights. It was so beautiful and bewildering that Peyton despaired of ever coming to know the complexity of New York.

Washed by the moonglow stretched flat plains, mostly under cultivation, dotted here and there with sheds and houses. Rivers of silver—the Hudson and the East—wound in and out under the city's mighty foundations. Most distantly, closing in around the cultivated ground, were dark fluffs of woodland. Somewhere to the north would be the ruins of the town Peyton had come from, the dust of all the people he had known and cared for. . . .

Well, he had one friend, Gramp Hooker. He had asked General Argyle to give Gramp a job as gladiator's helper. There was Willie, too. Peyton liked the Negro, who was so gentle, yet so self-assured, who would be the best helper and most dangerous adversary he could think of. And there was Thora.

"Aren't you thrilled?" she asked.

He smiled. His mouth-corners turned up this time, made his face look cheerful and quite young.

"I'm bored stiff," he said.

They both laughed. General Argyle heard them above the softly hissing motor, and turned to study them in unsympathetic wonder.

V

GRAMP and Willie were helping Peyton into his gladiator's costume in a small dressing room just inside the performers' passage to the circus stadium. Through the closed door resounded a muffled commotion of voices, scuffling feet and band music.

"Show's about to begin," announced Gramp, giving the gilt sandals on the table a final rub. "Say, Blackie, I don't know whether or not I ought to thank you for giving me a job as your dresser. Before that I got five hundred a day,

charity, just for being too old to work."

"Are you?" asked Peyton. To Willie he said, "This red sash makes me feel like Lord Fauntleroy."

"It looks good, Mister Blackie, and you don't fence like Lord Fauntleroy. You gave me a real workout yesterday."

"Drop the 'mister,' I've told you that a hundred times! Gramp, what did you do before you grizzled up?"

Gramp brought him the sandals.

"I was an Airman. Yep, I mean that. One of the old-fashioned kind. Act in the First World War, instructor at Montreal in the Second. Too old, of course, for the Third, or I might be one of the high monkey-monks up there on the Flying Island. As I stand, I'm just eighty-two and I don't feel a day over eighty-one."

"Eighty-two," repeated Willie. His manganese-colored palms smoothed the fine chain mail shirt on Peyton's chest and shoulders, passed gently over the bandaged side. "Weren't you kind of young for the First World War, Mister Gramp?"

"Don't you 'mister' me, neither. Yep, I was young, but I went. They took 'em young for the Air Force then. Stick up your foot, Blackie. How do these sandals look?"

Peyton gazed into a full-length mirror as Willie set a plumed helmet on his head and draped a flame-hued mantle on his back and over one arm. His bare legs were cross-gartered and a jeweled belt clasped his narrow waist. His pale skin, where it showed, had been skillfully stained a healthy brown.

"What a male Lucille!" he commented sourly.

"Not fighting clothes exactly," Willie agreed in his gentle voice as he donned his own more serviceable breastplate and strapped a sheathed sword at his left hip. "But you're just going to be in the parade to get introduced for next time. Be sure to watch my act. They've got some kind of novelty animal for me to fight. Wonder what it could be?"

Over his naked shoulder he swung a quiver of arrows and reached for a long hickory bow in a corner.

"I'll watch," promised Peyton. "After the introduction, I sit in the general's box with Thora and some other silky people."

"Yah!" jeered Gramp. "I was in the Roof Park and I spotted you riding around with that Thora girl. If I was younger by about thirty years, I'd gnaw under you and get her away."

His grizzled beard bunched with a teasing grin.

"It's all business," Peyton said. "She keeps saying so herself."

Someone knocked on the door.

"Three minutes, gentlemen! Parade now forming!"

WILLIE and Peyton emerged side by side. Just within the great, curtained doorway to the arena, the performers were being marshalled. At the crisp order of an Airman overseer, Willie fell in beside a towering blond

Surprise, Surprise!

SCOTCH-DRINKING friend of ours tried Lord Calvert at our home, out of sheer politeness. "Egad!" he exclaimed. "It really IS good!" We know he meant it, because he ordered a case from the local store next day. And he's not *that* polite.

If you're a scholar and a judge of whiskeys, try some Lord Calvert soon. It costs a little more and tastes a little better, and we think you'll be pleasantly surprised. (Surprised, too, how little space a case of Lord Calvert takes up.)

Lord Calvert. Blended Whiskey. 86.8 Proof. 65% Grain Neutral Spirits. Calvert Dist. Corp., N.Y.C.

gladiator in a cloak fringed with lion's fur. Others formed up behind them. Dancing girls, laughing and fussing with their flowing costumes, formed a graceful cloud. There were tractor-drawn cages full of beasts.

"Up here, Peyton!" called the overseer.

The attendants led forward a giant elephant with shining trappings. Peyton climbed up a ladder to a howdah.

The music blared louder, the curtains twitched away, and applause shook the noonday sky as the parade swung into the open. Peyton found the swaying elephant ride pleasant; he looked at the far-reaching slopes of the stadium, upon which fully three-hundred thousand were crowded. The faces he could make out looked rapt, greedy for excitement. Around the lower rim, behind barred parapets, sat the rich of New York, including many Airmen. He spotted General Argyle, Thora and the others in a choice box. They applauded him as the elephant lumbered past.

The parade, led by a rider on a white horse, executed a circuit of the arena, a cut-across, and finally halted, saluting to the peal of a fanfare. A microphone sprouted from a trap-door, rising on a metal stalk. The mounted leader addressed the stadium through loudspeakers, booming out greetings, program announcements, promises of thrills. Finally:

"It is my privilege and pleasure to introduce a performer who will be in action next week. Blackie Peyton, protégé of General Argyle!"

"Stand up," the overseer in the howdah bade Peyton.

Peyton did so. A searchlight rested blinkingly upon him. On impulse he mitted himself to the crowd, boxer fashion. They thundered approval of him. He sat down, feeling sick from the glare.

"That was to amplify you for a televise," the overseer said. "They all got a glimpse of you. Now they're hungry to see the color of your blood.

The parade ambled back through the main doorway. Dismounting, Peyton followed a fawning usher along a passageway to a small door.

Through this he stepped into the box of General Argyle.

The general shook hands with theatrical cordiality, introduced him to a dozen groomed and scented guests. Then he paused, for the moment of noon was at hand. Into view against the sun came the vast cushion-shaped shadow of the Flying Island. From it seemed to gush a beam, straight down upon the arena.

"Television message," someone whispered.

A cloud was forming above the sand. In its midst, as in a clairvoyant's crystal, was a radiant, flashing glimpse of a city, all golden spires and rainbow bubbles.

"That," whispered the someone beside Peyton, "is how the Flying Island must look."

Then the vision melted into a colossal reflection of a man's head and shoulders. It was Marshal Torridge, whom Peyton had seen televised once before.

"People of New York, I regret that I can be with you in image only. My best wishes to you and to General Argyle, your new commander. Enjoy the great circus which is now spread for your enjoyment."

The beam was gone and the dark patch slid away from the sun. Peyton gazed after it. Had he truly seen what it was like, or had he yet to find out?

"You look magnificent in that costume," Thora, beside him, was saying. "How do you feel?"

"Silly."

The man who had whispered spoke from the other side.

"You and I are artists, Peyton—you of swords, I of words."

PEYTON turned and looked at him. The man was a few years younger than he, slender and artificial in chocolate brown. His tawny hair seemed to be skillfully curled.

"My name is Bengali," he said. "I am a poet, recite twice a week over the radio. I may be inspired by you to a really fine set of verses."

He leaned back in his chair and fixed his blue eyes on the vault of the sky. He began to speak measuredly, as though he read words written up there.

"Across the smooth and sanded floor
Advanced, to high applause,
A swarthy hero, armed for war . . . ."

"Work in a lion's claws," suggested Peyton. "They've got cages and cages of lions." To Thora he said, "I've heard that there's no trade to supply us with real coffee or tobacco. How do they get lions and elephants to New York?"

She made no reply, for just then the show began. The dancing girls capered forth in a really graceful ballet, stopped in the middle of a tableau with shrieks. They broke into wild flight.

A monstrous rhinoceros, goaded from its pen, galloped after them in swift, clumsy rage. Head down, it almost caught the slowest of the girls on its horn, which had been stained black and highly polished to set off blood.

She reached the wall and someone in a box helped her to safety.

Alone, the armored monster lumbered around on the sand. Its dinosaur head, survival of a past age, tossed and swayed. It squealed and snorted like a mad stallion.

A shrill whistle blew from across the sand. Another small portal opened and Willie Burgoyne emerged. He was greeted with yells and cheers from the spectators, many of whom called him by name. The rhinoceros, too, faced that way. It peered like a short-sighted old man. Willie advanced at a trot, the strung bow in his left hand, with an arrow laid across.

The beast charged him, ungainly as a hog, swift as an antelope. Willie stood still. That deadly downflung plow of a horn slashed almost at his feet when he took a long, smooth stride to the left.

As the bulk of his adversary blundered by, he set the head of his arrow and released the string. The whole stadium, abruptly silent, heard the *twang*. Willie took long backward steps toward the center of the arena, while the wounded rhinoceros buck-jumped awkwardly in pain. It came at him again, more slowly than before.

"Magnificent!" murmured Bengali, the poet. "It is the legend of the unicorn's hunting, enacted before our eyes. But, of course," he added with pedantic superiority, "only a maiden, pure and beautiful and snow-white, can destroy the unicorn."

"Well," said Peyton, "my money rides on that dark lad out there to win. Want to bet?"

Nobody took him up on it.

AS THE rhinoceros drew near for the second time, Willie again stepped aside. He set a swift, black hand on the shoulder-hump of the beast and vaulted easily upon its back. The rhinoceros stopped, as though powerful brakes had been applied. Willie dropped his bow and whipped out his straight sword. His free forefinger touched a point behind the left shoulder, then his weapon drove in to the hilt. He dismounted with an airy leap, ran several steps away, turned his back and bowed with a graceful flourish.

The rhinoceros collapsed and died behind him.

Howls and hurrahs rang out. Willie made his exit and a midget tractor chugged forth to haul away the carcass.

Attendants threw sand on the splotches of blood.

A horseman rode out, dressed as a cowboy. He waved his hands to the applauding multitude and reined in to look for his foe. It appeared from a door opposite—a bison bull, almost as large as the rhinoceros and fully as intent on destruction.

Head low, shaggy hump high, it hurled itself at the cowboy.

"I thought those things were extinct," said Peyton.

"There are great herds reported out West," volunteered Bengali. He patted a yawn with his beringed right hand, then sat up abruptly. "Oh, this is delicious!"

His approval was for the sudden victory of the bison bull. The cowboy had expertly spread a lariat, whirling it around his head. He launched it at the oncoming bison, settling it down over the black bulk and rearing back quickly. The noose, given a second's opportunity, would have tightened around all four feet. But the bison, by chance or by cunning, leaped high at that moment. The noose flickered away without catching.

A moment later the two curved horns had dipped under the belly of the horse, lifting it and hurling it ten yards away. The crowd was yelling, but not loud enough to drown the shrill scream of the gored horse. The man fell beside his floundering mount, plowing the sand with his face. He got to his hands and knees, then to his feet. He ran, staggering.

Spinning on its bunched toes, as a cat spins, the bull leaped, tossed him like an empty sack. He fell heavily. The horns scooped him up and tossed him again. The sun illuminated his flying body, picked out the bright crimson blood.

Another figure sped forth, a gladiator in the costume of a clown. As the bison prodded the prone cowboy for a third time, this newcomer caught and pulled the corkscrew tail. The beast left its victim and the gaily dressed clown ran comically before it. There was loud laughter on all sides.

As they shot past another door, Willie Burgoyne stepped out and launched a quick arrow. The bison somersaulted and lay kicking. The applause was like spring thunder.

"Still bored?" Thora asked Peyton.

He shook his head bleakly.

"Many people are frightened at their first circus," said Argyle.

"Not me," replied Peyton. "Only sick to my stomach."

Everyone in the box turned and stared. Peyton didn't care. He had spoken the truth.

Riches, expense, lavishness, a morbid mess of thrills for these New Yorkers who were kept pent up in their great box of a city! The Airmen, with their flying craft, could import rhinoceros and buffalo, but not coffee and tobacco. The Pit had been a better prison, because it didn't pretend to be anything else.

The warden had said that the world was changed. He should have said that the world had reverted to barbarism.

The Flying Island, though, might be different.

VI

GRAMP waited for Peyton in the dressing room. Willie had already changed and sought his living quarters nearby.

"You look like an advance agent for the Fourth World War," Gramp said. "What made you mad?"

Peyton scowled still more blackly.

"Didn't you see that poor cowpoke?"

"If you're going to be a gladiator, you'd better get used to blood."

It was a new thought. Peyton mulled it over while he doffed his dress armor.

"Things have changed, all right—for the worse." He dropped his cloak on the dressing table. "I ought to go out and get drunk."

Gramp looked up from unstrapping his sandals.

"Can you scrounge a holiday from that blond peril?"

"Thora? Sure. That's just part of my work, anyway."

"Nice work if you can get it," commented Gramp tritely. "Come with me tonight down to the Underways."

"Underways?" repeated Peyton.

"What used to be slums. We'll have fun."

"General Argyle gave me only thirty thousand dollars yesterday for pin money."

"It's a fortune in the Underways. Scrub off that pretty suntan paint and wear your old clothes."

The covered, dimly lighted street they came to was fenced with mighty concrete pilings instead of buildings. Glancing between these, Peyton saw other pilings of wood, plastic or cement, like the trunks of a dismal forest. Only a few buildings lined the streets. Traffic was made up of pedestrians, mostly heavy-laden. Some carried huge parcels. Others balanced baskets on pole-ends, like Chinese coolies. Peyton saw no vehicles at all.

"And you say lots of people live down here?" he demanded of Gramp. "What for?"

"Because they're made to. Somebody has to look after all these piles and braces."

Peyton paused and stared through the seemingly endless thickets of upright columns. It was a dismal view.

"This is the basement of New York," continued Gramp. "With all the weight that's on these supports, they need to be repaired, or replaced, or guy-wired, or strengthened all the time. So most of the poor people—like me, before I got too old for it—are down here, slaving and messing around. Naturally they live down here."

"Naturally?"

Gramp smiled fiercely in his beard.

"Another thing the Airmen figured out. If the boys who keep the town braced up live down here, they'll do the job well. They'll be crushed first and flattest by any slip—in here, Blackie."

AMONG the pilings stood a slovenly shack. They went in through an atmosphere rank with synthetic tobacco fumes. There was a bar, a fly-specked mirror, a throng of shabby men, mostly old. They all drank industriously. One or two hailed Gramp by name. He hailed back and steered Peyton to a free space at the bar.

"Tony," he said to the bartender, "my pal Blackie will buy some beer."

Peyton laid down a five-hundred-dollar bill.

"Have something yourself," he invited the bartender. "Here's looking, Gramp." He lifted his glass. "I like this place. No fluff and no Airmen."

"Most of these guys work at propping up the town," explained Gramp. "The older ones are charity dolers, like me. Most of them are good eggs, done a job or two in their lives."

"We have that," assured a nearby oldster with a hooked nose. "Me, I was a sailor when I was a boy. Huh! Who sails now?"

"The Airmen," replied Peyton. "They sail through the air with the greatest racket of all time. Have a beer, sailor."

The old tar dipped his beak into the drink.

"None of us like the Airmen down here, and they kind of keep out of our way. Pilings have been known to fall on snoopers."

Peyton drank, too.

"This beer's not synthetic, anyway. Boys, you sound like you're boiling up a poor man's fight against the Airmen."

He wondered if he was talking too much, but Gramp's rejoinder was frank enough to reassure him.

"It's every man's fight, Blackie. Everybody suffers. They tax the rich and work the poor. Nobody really has much to lose."

"If this talk got back to General Argyle—" mused Peyton.

"If it did," the sailor interrupted grimly, "somebody might stick a knife into you and walk it all the way around you. Remember that, before you sing to any Airmen."

"None of that talk, sailor," Gramp cautioned. "Blackie's square. I wouldn't be training with him if he wasn't."

"More beer," said Peyton.

When they had their second round, Gramp put his beard close to Peyton's ear.

"Follow me," he whispered.

He led Peyton to the back of the room. There was a door marked "Kitchen."

They entered a room where a red-faced cook boiled ham and cabbage, passed through a door marked "Pantry," a dark passage beyond. Peyton's Pit glow face lighted them to a third door, where Gramp knocked four times.

"Joe Hooker," he called.

An automatic lock buzzed and the door swung wide. They came into a small, bare, windowless room. A man looked up from behind a battered desk. He was lean and had tawny hair that was artificially curled.

"Say," exclaimed Peyton, stopping. "Aren't you Bengali, the radio poet?"

"Stand easy," invited Bengali in a voice unlike his affected tones at the circus. "The Airmen figured me for a fool. I want them to. But I was there to observe you, decide if Gramp Hooker was right when he said you might be useful to us."

Peyton rested his knuckles on the desk top.

"What are you?"

"Chief of Council for the Committee against the Airmen."

Peyton relaxed. "Oh, revolution."

"Not exactly. Revolution implies something new. We want only the old. The days before Nineteen-Sixty weren't perfect, but they were free—and better than this. You admit as much. You don't like the Airmen."

"Being an Airman is being expert at a certain job," said Peyton. "I don't squawk about anybody who does his job right. But when a bunch of high-class mechanics begins to push itself on top of everybody and roosts up there, playing God—"

He broke off. Again he feared he was talking too much.

"That's putting it clearly," stated Bengali calmly. "The war ended with peace in the hands of Airmen throughout the world. They organized, holding all the arms and all the authority. Nobody could give them an argument. The terms sounded wonderful. No more war. All weapons to remain in the hands of an international governing class. Dole benefits for the aged and work for the poor. Taxes on the rich. Production and other activity to be supervised. All to be run by the men best fitted by service and training for the job of ruling. How does that sound?"

"Perfect," replied Peyton, "but it isn't working out."

BENGALI nodded. "Exactly. If the Airmen had played the game square and above-board, this would be heaven. They played it crooked, to get power and gain for themselves, and it's purgatory. And they themselves aren't pleased, either."

"Not pleased?" blurted Peyton. "That's hard to understand."

Bengali paused to clarify the idea.

"There are just a few of them and so many of us, they need that great Flying Island to keep spinning around Earth to keep a weather eye on everything. Population centers like this—everybody crowded together, with no scattered rural sub-centers and wild country where outlaws might escape to—helps simplify the problem, but not too much.

"Twenty thousand Airmen have to keep busy. Most of them are stationed at the various towns, policing, supervising and governing. And the ones who began it, after twenty years, aren't so young and brash and energetic any more. They want to relax, take a vacation. They don't dare. The younger Airmen, chafing to take their places, might step in."

"You sound sure," commented Peyton.

"I can even give you names. General Argyle, a very able man, has been put in command of New York. He's not satisfied. He wants to be marshal, master of everything, in the place of Torridge up there on that Island." Bengali smiled again, as though there were a happy side to what he said. "If the Airmen fall out among themselves, we who are planning against them can do something."

"Let me think for a moment," Peyton pleaded.

He had no doubt that Bengali, traveling in high circles and low, could be pretty sure of his facts. The Airmen had their work cut out for them, governing the world. A split would mean dissension, reduction of numbers, diverting of attention. A strong move on the part of the ground folk might have an effect, but if only the poor and old and overworked were in that movement—

Bengali read that thought.

"I have headquarters and aliases down here, because these people have more desperation and hope of gain than anybody. I don't trust many of the rich. My setup there is no more than a skeleton."

Peyton felt that Bengali, no matter how smart, was slipping. How could these cellar-prowlers fight against the Airmen, armed and winged and with the Flying Island? Atomic energy as fuel and explosive was imperative. The whole city of New York could be blasted away. Probably he, Peyton, was lucky to be finding this out. He could use such knowledge.

Gramp entered the conversation.

"You see, Blackie, I'm not just a hungry old coot. Nobody bothers about me, but I can get around. I can study a man like you—strong, smart, dissatisfied, with special knowledge—and figure a way to use him."

"Special knowledge?" repeated Peyton. "You mean atomic energy? I know only a little about it."

"That little is more than we know," Bengali said.

"But I just wrestled the machines. Of course I know how to handle it, in those containers made of inerton—"

"Inerton!" exclaimed Bengali. "That leadlike metal mined way down below? It's the first I ever heard—ah, now I see why our mechanice are on the right track, making motors that can use the atomic! You're wrong, Peyton. You can help us a lot. The prison is run by the most faithful jackals the Airmen have. No news ever comes out of it, about atomic or anything else."

In other words, Peyton summed up in his mind, his own limited knowledge and the considerable labored guesswork of Bengali's companions might add up to something. His earlier intuition was right. He would be fortunate to know and observe two powers lining up for conflict. He could choose, in good time, the winner. Perhaps he could sway to that winning side the few people he liked in this insane world—Gramp, Willie, even Thora.

Among other things, the Flying Island would belong to the victor. To go there, high above Earth, and close to the sun and stars, forget the bustle and the strangeness—

"Are you in with us, Peyton?" Bengali was asking.

"Of course." Peyton smiled cheerfully, his mouth corners up instead of down for a change. "If I'd said no, what would have happened to me?"

Neither man made a verbal reply, but Gramp shut a big claspknife with a loud snap. Peyton turned and looked.

"I didn't see that toad-sticker."

"Sure you didn't," agreed Gramp. "I was holding it behind your back, with the point about an inch from the place where your shoulders come together. Just one little shove and you'd never have got out to Tony's bar to finish the drinks you paid for."

VII

AT A central point on the vast roof-level, apart from the parks and pleasure grounds, were assembled great ranks and formations of open troughs and tubs. Each was kept filled with water, which trickled in through pipes at a rate that exactly balanced evaporation. Other pipes brought in carefully measured solutions of various mineral salts. The troughs and tubs were covered with coarse wire screens, which supported the close-set stems of tomatoes, green corn, beans, peas. This was New York's truck garden.

Farming thus intensively and arti-

ficially, agricultural experts produced large and edible, if not exactly flavorful specimens enough for the millions. A tank, a few bucketfuls of proper chemicals, produced a volume of vegetables that once needed acres. "Bathtub farming," half a joke in 1940, was a bountiful enterprise in 1980.

Many came to look. None bothered about the Flying Island that came overhead, with one exception.

Blackie Peyton sat among flowering shrubs at the edge of the chemical garden, leaning back with his face turned up. His skin was becoming faintly ruddy and he could see without his dark spectacles. The clothes he wore were expensive and well cut. Only his thoughts set him aside from the regiments of strolling Upper Towners in the parks, gardens and malls of New York's rooftop.

The Flying Island! Peyton, seeing it block away the sun, remembered again the vision he had seen so briefly of gleaming towers and rainbow chambers. That and the face and figure of Marshal Torridge were new and thrilling. Everyone else was used to the Flying Island, though nobody ever took it for granted. That symbol of power, he knew, was an influence on every life from which it blocked out the noonday sun.

He remembered what Bengali had said to him in that little denlike office behind the bar in the prop-forest of New York's lowest level. The Airmen had the world by the neck and the seat of the pants. Ground people, here and in other places, did the work, the producing. The Airmen governed ably, so that the people would prosper and be profitable.

Though few in number, the Airmen had all the weapons and held all the strings. Normally, even if all New York's millions rebelled in a chunk, there wouldn't be a chance of victory against guns and bombs and atomic planes overhead.

Bengali's hope was in the struggle between Argyle and Torridge. Torridge commanded, but he was tired and aging. Argyle was ambitious, shrewd, influential. A division of the Airmen might give Bengali's crowd—he called it a committee, but there seemed to be thousands of them—a chance to pull off something, especially since neither Argyle nor Torridge had any idea of a possible uprising.

But what if Peyton told? There probably was some way to get word to Torridge of what was up. He might even be called up yonder to give information. Surely the boss Airman, in possession of the facts, could put an end to both Argyle and Bengali. And there would be Peyton, up on the Flying Island, circling the world, one of the right-hand men of Marshal Torridge!

"It isn't my fight, either way," he told himself. "I was put in jail by a world that doesn't exist. All this business happened without me. I can treat myself honestly, do what's best for me, because I owe nobody anything. Shakespeare or somebody said you ought to be true to yourself."

BUT his nature was not one that admired betrayal. And as to being friendless and debtless, he couldn't cross off Gramp or Willie. No, nor Thora, even if her kindly conversation was strictly business—but was it?

As if evoked by the thought, her voice reached him.

"Imagine meeting like this, Mr. Peyton! You're getting a wonderful outdoor color."

She sat down beside him on the bench. She wore slacks and a metallically gleaming sweater, in the prevailing mode among smart women.

"Thanks," he said. "Just you stay fair."

"I think white skin's becoming to a blonde," she replied carelessly. "Almost all women try to tan. I thought I'd do the opposite and be a standout."

"You'd always be a standout, Thora, in any crowd."

"Thank you, sir." She smiled.

The Flying Island slid over and away

from the sun. Both of them gazed after it.

"I wonder what that place is like," mused Peyton. "Ever been up there, Thora?"

"I? No. Women aren't allowed. Not even the Airmen's wives, and they always marry into the families of rich or influential ground people. But the Airwomen—some call them that—live here in the rich levels, or sometimes on resorts at the edge of the cultivated part. Marshal Torridge doesn't want any women up there."

"I suppose," he said, "that you've had plenty of chances to marry Airmen."

"Not me." She laughed it away. "I have no money. They feel that they should get as close to the ground aristocracy as possible."

"Is it that," asked Peyton, "or do they want members of those important families for hostages in case of trouble?"

"You ask dangerous questions, Mr. Peyton. What gives you the idea there might be trouble?"

He saw that he had made a near-error and strove to change the subject.

"I don't let Willie Burgoyne mister me. Don't you do it, either. My name to my friends is Blackie."

"Thank you." Thora smiled again. "I do want you to be a friend of mine. But Blackie sounds so—so deadly. What's your real name?"

"Pierce."

"It sounds sharp." She turned to him on the bench, her face grave. "Pierce, I want to warn you. Don't question the Airmen, or block them. You'll be destroyed utterly and I'd hate to see that."

"That's very nice to hear, coming from you. I figured you were practically one of them."

Again she shook her blonde head.

"I only work for them. General Argyle, being in a line of endeavor that demands show and notice, values me as a good ornament for certain uses. Naturally I have loyalty to my employers, but I was born poor, here in New York. I belong on the ground. Probably I'll stay on the ground. And I'm not trying to frighten you with my warning. I only want to help you."

"I believe that." Peyton smiled with his mouth corners up. "You know, I said that not much pleased me here. That doesn't include you, Thora."

"Thank you," she told him once more. "Shall we walk around? People will be interested in seeing you. It's good publicity for the next show."

WILLIE BURGOYNE and Peyton were working out in the gymnasium. Only Gramp was present to watch. Armorless, with shields and blunted swords, the two gladiators fenced and foiled enthusiastically. Once Willie yelled as Peyton's blunt edge struck him on the elbow. Finally Gramp called time and they stood back from each other, panting a little. Willie put down his shield and sword.

"You're too good for me, Mister Blackie."

"Stop that mister and don't razz me. You're pulling your punches."

"It's you who pulls punches. You're not in earnest."

"Nobody can be in dead earnest unless it's a real fight, for blood," Peyton declared.

The three went out of the gymnasium and down a corridor toward their living quarters. As they passed one of the stadium offices, the door opened. Out came an Airman wearing a holstered pistol and a police badge. By the arm he led a seedy, gray man with a hooked nose. The captive turned his face away quickly from the three, but Gramp started and cursed behind the curtain of his beard. As they strode in the opposite direction from the Airman and his charge, Gramp whispered to Peyton, so Willie couldn't hear.

"You know that old guy, Blackie—the one with the Airman?"

"Why should I know him? I meet people all the time and can't remember ten per cent of them."

"It was the sailor. You know, the man

we drank with at the bar."

"That so?"

Peyton started to turn and look at the departing pair, but decidid not to show his face. He went with Willie and Gramp to a shower room. While Willie was scrubbing himself, he drew Gramp aside.

"You act as if you don't trust Willie."

Gramp wagged his head. "It ain't that. He'd be too well known to have in with us. I asked you in while you're still unknown. We hope to do something quickly."

"You bet it'll have to be quick," Peyton declared. "If that sailor has been singing any sea songs to the Airmen, you and I are probably in a jam."

Gramp's eyes grew hard and serious.

"I don't worry about myself. I'm too old, a bum, kind of easy for people to forget. But they can do things to you, Blackie, kill you just like that!" He snapped his fingers.

"They tried to kill Willie once," reminded Peyton. "He sounds healthy, though."

Willie was singing in the shower. He had a rich bass voice and his song was an old, mournful ballad about a Birmingham jail. He came out, gleaming like a living statue of polished basalt.

"What are you two so glum about?" he asked. "You look like somebody you knew up and died on you."

"Willie," said Gramp, "I hope you ain't turned soothsayer all of a sudden."

VIII

THE hubbub from the thronged stadium penetrated even to the dressing rooms, where Peyton and Willie, in richly worked half-armor, were headed after a particularly dazzling parade. Both of them were in high spirits.

"Who you fighting, Mister Blackie?"

"I don't know. Surprise opponent. And how many times do I have to tell you not to call me—"

"I'm fighting a surprise opponent, too," interrupted Willie. "But I think I can guess what they are."

"They?"

"You remember those new animal shipments? We saw them this morning."

"I saw some pigs," Peyton said slowly.

"Gray and black pigs, not awful big, and lean and mean-eyed, with wet-looking, pink noses? Come from South America, those pigs do. They call them peccary."

"Peccary? Never heard about them. What's their specialty?"

"Nothing, except they're mighty nasty in a fight." Willie was grinning with relish. "I hear they drag down men, horses, even bears or panthers."

"You don't sound worried, Willie."

"Why should I be? They'll rush me in a bunch. I'll be all set and jump clear over them. Before they can turn, I'll finish two or three. They'll rush again, I'll jump over and do it again. And so on."

They came to the door of their dressing room.

An Airman was standing there.

"Dress down the corridor," he told Willie.

"But my stuff's in with Mister Blackie's," Willie protested.

"It's been moved. General Argyle wants to speak to Peyton alone."

Willie grabbed Peyton's hand and wished him luck, then walked on. Peyton opened the door and entered.

Argyle and Thora sat in chairs. Thora smiled, Argyle nodded. Peyton tried not to look or sound disturbed as he said:

"Glad to see you two. What's on your minds?"

Argyle took the cigarette holder out of his mouth.

"Do you know a man named Bengali, a so-called poet?"

The truth was best, for the present.

"Of course I know him, General. Why?"

"I'm asking the questions. I hear that you and he are cooking up some sort of monkey business. Tell me everything, quick!"

Peyton smiled invertedly, turned to the dressing table. Sparring for time,

he picked up several pieces of armor.

"Where's Gramp Hooker? He ought to be here to help me get ready."

"You're refusing to answer," accused Argyle.

He stooped, buckled on a thigh piece, a greave, an iron shoe, made the joinings fast. He had an inspiration by then. "You're suspicious of me for some reason, General. I can't be sure what. I could deny things now, but you wouldn't believe me. Hadn't we better wait, cool down, see what charges are being made? Let's talk it out after the show."

"There may be no after-the-show for you," said Argyle.

Peyton put on more leg armor.

"Gladiators take that chance. I have my mind on the show and what may happen to me."

"Let me talk to him, General," Thora said.

Argyle nodded stiffly and walked out.

PEYTON faced Thora, trying to read her face.

"Pierce," she said, "you can trust me. Please tell me everything. You're in a jam, but I'll try to help you out."

He wished he could trust her, knew he had to say something.

"It wouldn't help me if I confirmed Argyle's suspicions," he temporized.

Thora came close and put a hand on his armored shoulder.

"The Airmen have evidence that you're mixed up in something called the Committee against the Airmen, which plans to make some sort of rebellion. If you're really in it, you'll be dangerous because of your knowledge of atomic power."

He realized that she spoke the truth. Reduce things to their simplest terms and atomic power was what made the Airmen fly, set them above the ground people. Bengali had spoken of experimental motors. Peyton's bits of knowledge would round out such work. Again he temporized:

"You and they believe that I'm mixed up in a thing like that, right after coming out of stir?"

"They're fairly sure, and I know it," she said flatly. You gave it away when you spoke to me in the park about the Airmen's wives being 'hostages in case of trouble.' I told you then that you spoke dangerously, but I didn't know how deeply you were involved. Argyle and the Airmen take the talk of an uprising very seriously."

"You make me feel important," he answered as casually as he could. "But if they're so sure I'm in it, why don't they go to work on me without any questions?"

"Because," said Thora, "they want information from you. It will help convict the others in the movement."

Peyton's inverted smile came back into view. He took a helmet, plumed and visored, from the dressing table, but did not put it on. He made a last effort to bluff it out.

"I ought to thank the Airmen for the high opinion they have of me. But if—mind you, I say *if*—I were mixed up in the committee, or whatever it is, and if I ratted on my friends, where would I be then? I'd be as guilty as ever and worse off, because I'd have given the information and would be of no use. Go tell that to General Argyle."

Thora went to the door, put her hand out to open it. She paused and turned back.

"Can't you see that I want to save you, Pierce?"

"You're holding up the circus, lady. I've got a show to put on. People are expecting me to give them a treat."

"That's part of it!" she cried. "Right now Argyle has given up any hope of getting information from you. He'll have passed on some orders that he had all ready. They'll send in opponents that you can't hope to kill—opponents that will destroy you very showily, with all the stadium howling in delight!"

"I heard of something like that being tried on Willie Burgoyne and not working." He breathed deeply. "I think you're wasting time in being nice to me."

"Why?"

"Shall I tell you the story of my life, Thora? I was born wretched. My folks died when I was a kid. I got mixed up with some crooks and by hard luck was sent up for murder. I was an incorrigible convict. They put me down in the Pit. You know what that is, I see."

SHE stared. "Why do you say that?"

"Because you jumped when you heard the name. In the Pit, you smash atoms for this power the Airmen use. It's hard work, dirty, killing. Mostly you crack up or go crazy, or get a bad heart and die. I didn't do any of those. I shook off twenty long, hard years. And then, because I saved some guard's life, they let me go. I'm only an ex-convict, Thora. Get that into your head."

"Pierce," she said, "there's a light switch over your dressing table. Go to it."

"What for?" he asked, but set down his helmet and put his hand on the switch.

"Keep your eyes on me," she directed. "Now turn out the light."

The windowless room was plunged into blackness, but in that blackness appeared two faces. The luminous features of Peyton stared at the luminous features of Thora. In the darkness the glowing masks moved toward each other.

"What is this?" asked Peyton huskily.

"Isn't it pretty obvious?"

"Only one thing can make your skin shed light—Pit glow."

"Which I've got, Pierce, just like you. I served three years in the Women's Division down there. You never heard of the Women's Division. I was sentenced for killing an Airman."

"How?"

"He was head of the circus here before Argyle, and he saw me at a performance. He was drunk or drugged, got too friendly. I gave him a push. He fell into the arena and a tiger got him. Of course it was called murder."

"How did you beat the rap?"

"General Argyle made a visit to the Pit. I was pointed out to him as the reason for his promotion. I was in rough clothes, ungroomed and haggard, but he thought he saw something worth developing. He needed an attractive woman for the publicity job I've been doing. He also needed a spy, someone who could attract men and hear their idle talk, keep him and other Airmen informed of what goes on here in town."

"I see what makes you want to be a faithful employee."

"But, Pierce, my heart goes out to someone who served time in the Pit!"

Peyton turned on the lights, picked up his helmet again.

"Go to Argyle," he said. "Tell him that I kept quiet. I'm going to fight whatever he sends against me and try to do what Willie did. If I conquer whatever it is—"

"Of course!" breathed Thora. "The people will cheer you too enthusiastically for him to let you be destroyed at once. After that, though, there'll be more questions."

"I'll talk to Argyle afterward," promised Peyton. "If I know he can't kill me, I'll make some sort of trade on the information and slide out. Pull for me, will you?"

They were still close together. Suddenly Thora stood on tiptoe and kissed his savage mouth, then turned and ran out.

Alone, Peyton slid the helmet over his head and hooked it securely to his shoulder armor. The barred visor he drew down over his face. For a moment he regarded himself in the mirror. He looked like the personification of fighting manhood. Well, he'd tried to be smart, out-think the Airmen and the men who rallied behind Bengali. He'd put himself in a nasty mess. Now it was up to him to fight his way out. He thought he could do it.

"Fight!" he cried savagely at his own image.

His voice roared unrecognizably inside the closed helmet. Belting on his sword,

he selected a shield from among several that hung on the wall. He went out and up the corridor toward the curtained entrance to the arena. An attendant waited there.

"Hurry, Peyton! You're due out on the sand. They're yelling their heads off for you."

"They can stick their heads back on," growled Peyton. "Here I come."

Brushing the curtain aside, he tramped into the open, Thora's kiss still on his lips as they tightened in the inverted fighting grin.

IX

PEYTON mitted himself to the bellowing masses and faced the door through which his unknown enemy would come. A sort of muffling fog seemed to settle down all around, just inside the line of the box-fronts. The great funnel of faces in the stadium became dimmed and unimportant. The multiple howl and cheer died away to an oceanic murmur. Peyton drew his sword. Inside his visor he grinned to himself. He didn't feel the slightest possibility of defeat.

The door opposite him was opening. An armed and armored figure came out, much bigger than he and moving with slow, sure steps.

The armor of his adversary might have been stolen from a museum. A cuirass of rigid, gold-embossed plating caged the thick torso. The closed helmet, with comb atop, was connected to the shoulders of the cuirass by a jointed collar and a chain mail tag in front, like a jabot. The arms, forearms and wrists were similarly protected by cunning jointed pieces. Even the chain mail mittens had backs of plating.

You didn't see work like that in these days, mused Peyton appreciatively. The old-timers must have taken pride in every hammer-tap. The brawny legs wore skin-tight breeches of leather, faced on the front of thigh and shin with curved slips of steel. All told, it was as good armor as Peyton's own, and maybe a trifle better.

The big fellow was approaching lightly and surely, for all the metal he wore. But as he came near, he paused. He was somehow indecisive. Peyton felt his neck-hair bristle inside the brass-mounted gorget.

I don't know who you are, he addressed the other in his heart, but I'm

SONNET TO PEBBLES IN A CONCRETE MIXER

Conceived in cataclysmic fire, and born
In terrifying labor from Earth's womb,
While Time was weaving eons on her loom,
At last from Nature's cradle you were torn,
And dancing down a mountainside, were worn
To lovely shapes; then polished, given bloom
By tumbling streams. This temporary tomb
Is but your night before another morn.
Before man was, you knew the snowcapped peaks,
The leaping waterfalls, the winds that blow;
And when he, self-destroyed by his own might,
Has been forgotten, with the things he seeks,
You, resurrected, once again may know
The music of the eternal Infinite.

By ALFRED I. TOOKE

going to make you sick of the gladiator business.

He too moved in, tensing his muscles for action. If the crowd cheered any louder, he did not know.

Clang!

Peyton struck, heard the ring and felt the shock of his blade on the quickly interposed shield of the big gladiator. He set himself for the *riposte.* It did not come. His enemy was falling back warily. At last Peyton could hear the mob in the stadium. It was booing.

"Come on and fight," Peyton taunted. His voice sounded big and hoarse inside the helmet. "I don't usually speak to strangers, but we've got a show to give."

He prodded tentatively with his point, seeking a way around the edge of the opposing shield. Forced to make a return, the touch stabbed, but without much strength. Peyton easily turned the attack with a flick of his shield wrist. He replied with a whacking cut that almost beat down the other's guard and nicked the comb of the helmet.

"Are you here to fight or play patty-cake?" jeered Peyton. "I can't do the work for both of us."

HE FEINTED the other's shield aside, cut under neatly and pricked the left arm at a point where the shoulder piece had momentarily slid away. A widening red stain appeared on the bright armor.

"First blood!" cried a woman.

He saw that his enemy's retreat had brought them close to the wall, at a point near Argyle's box. That had been Thora cheering him. Peyton felt his blood race. He was winning, and he was being cheered to victory by the only voice in all that crowd which mattered to him. If only this guy would make a scrap of it, give him a chance to show off, he'd be a hero! A thousand General Argyles wouldn't dare to kick him around.

This was easy, Peyton thought, grinning. Your feet grew lighter instead of heavier in those iron shoes. The creak and jingle of your armor made a sort of music. Your hands did what you wanted, even before your mind was made up. And you moved and fought twice as flashily, daring to take showy chances because your big, lumbering opponent was dull or scared or sick, or all three.

Shield grated against shield. You felt the other's strength. He did have that, though he didn't seem to know how to use it. Better not hustle and heave against so much bulk, Blackie. Stay away. Fence and fool him. Make him look ridiculous. Ho! Another touch at the seam, where the front and back halves of the cuirass came together. More blood. And the big husk charged at last, because he had to.

Willie Burgoyne beat the rhinoceros. That was the way, he told himself. Peyton waited until the great, ironclad body was almost upon him, then sprang wide. For a moment the foe couldn't wheel. Peyton made a sweeping cut with his sword, hard and wicked. The edge bit into the side of the helmet. Down clanged the big carcass, like an old wood stove collapsing. It quivered, rolled over on its back, sword flying one way, shield another. It didn't get up.

What to do now? Oh, yes, Willie had told him that. The fallen giant was still breathing deep, painful whistles and stirring a little, but he must be badly hurt. Peyton shoved him back on the sand with an iron shoe. Sword-point resting on the arena floor, hands crossed on the hilt. Pose. Look toward General Argyle's box, see what the crowd wants.

No doubt what the crowd wanted. Fists were up and reversed, thumbs pointing down. Death for the man who was down. Argyle was making the motion imperatively. Thora wasn't turning her thumb down. Her hands were clasped. She was smiling at Peyton.

No sane human being likes to kill in cold blood, but if he must, he must. Sword-point to that chain mail over the throat. Press hard. It goes in deep. Blood spurts like a fountain.

More cheers. Peyton frowned. Who

was this fellow he'd killed? On impulse, he lifted a toe and roughly kicked up the visor.

"Willie!"

WILLIE'S flat, dark face was growing strangely bloodless, bruise-tinted. Peyton felt the mist close in, blinding and deafening. He dropped to his knees, felt the sand working up under the plates of his shin armor.

"So it was you, Mister Blackie. . . . I didn't want to fight. . . . "

Different face now. Not gentle or hurt or anything at all. Just blank. That's how your friend looks after you've killed him. Close those fixed eyes. Blood on your glove. Your friend's blood. *You've killed Willie Burgoyne!*

Up on your feet again, quick! Attendants coming, in clown suits, with big hooks to drag Willie away. Whirl your sword.

"Stand back, you rats! Nobody touches that body! Nobody, you hear?"

The clowns run. They look funny. Everybody in the stands is laughing, but the clowns don't feel funny, you can bet. Now what's the whopping about? Turn around, Blackie Peyton. They've sent something else in after you.

Ughhh!

What makes a sound like that? What a sickening brute! You've only seen pictures of such things, heard stories. It's a gorilla, big, meaty-muscled, like Willie. Dark-faced, coming at you, lurching up on his short, bent legs, drumming his chest. That chest must be as hard as wood.

Gorillas aren't born vicious, but this one had been caged and starved for months while men teased it. All it wants is a chance to get within grab-reach of a man. And you're a man, Blackie. It's going to get within grab-reach of you. Get that shield up, that sword up. You're fighting for your life!

Over as quick and easy as that? Did it kill you before you knew it? No, you're still standing. It's the gorilla that's down, about a dozen yards away from Willie, with your sword through it. Pull the sword out.

That was a fluke. It smacked at you. You ducked. It grabbed. Hugging you, it hugged your sword-point right through its own solar plexus. Your armor saved your ribs. No, no time for thinking about that! Here comes the next course.

A scampering, mousy-gray herd of pigs. Pigs? These are the peccary that Willie expected to fight. Bad medicine, these. If they get those thorny tusks into you, they'll pull you down. Your armor won't save you. Do what Willie planned to do. Stand ready, knees bent. Here they are, right onto you, twelve or thirteen—

Jump, Blackie!

You're behind them. You got three in three slashes. Kill another as they form and rush. Jump again, free, kill two. Only half a dozen left. Wisely they stand off. Don't wait for them to start trouble, rush them yourself. Six can be killed before they can rip through your leg armor. It's pig-sticking. They're easy to kill, if you don't care whether you're killed yourself or not. . . .

They're all down. Peccary, imported at great trouble and expense from the tropics. You've stuck them all in about ninety seconds. Listen to the crowd yell its ugly head off, because here we go again!

They've turned an elephant loose on you. No trappings, no tusks, and the only cruel eyes you ever saw in an elephant. You've heard of this one. They trained him to knock a man down and kneel on him. Well, why run and hide? Get it over with.

But the monster has stopped by Willie's body. *Sniff, sniff* goes the trunk.

"You get up off him?"

It's kneeling on Willie. Run at the big, doubled-down hunk of meat. It's lifting its trunk. Slash—slash hard! Hundreds of muscles in an elephant's trunk, but no bone. You've cut that trunk off with one blow. The elephant's on his feet again, spouting blood. He's dying, down on his knees, collapsing.

You've killed an elephant with a sword.

And now the crowd deafens you. Look, they've got their hands open, palm out! The mercy sign—General Argyle couldn't have you killed, after all. The people won't let you die. They want to save you for other shows. They love to watch men kill men in sport. . . .

Argyle recognized the voice of the people, even if the people aren't all Airmen. He signals mercy, too. Sudden silence. You can hear it. There's a trap-door opening in the sand. A microphone pole sprouts up.

You're to talk, eh? Well, talk! Step up, Blackie, rip open your visor. You've got something to say.

"You should have killed me when you had the chance. You made me kill a friend, but his death is yours too. I'm still alive, and now I'm your enemy. The enemy of this circus and of the Airmen who run it. Of all who bow and scrape to the Airmen. Now I'm going to walk out of here. Stop me, anyone who dares. I'm as full of death as a drug store and some of it will rub off on the first one who touches me!"

Still the silence, like swamp water over your head. Walk toward the exit, Blackie. Your feet aren't light in the iron shoes now. They're like lead. Don't be surprised if they drop off at the ankles.

Somebody may shoot you in the back as you walk out, but does it really matter?

X

AS PEYTON slouched into the dressing room, Gramp rose and came toward him. Peyton lifted a fending glove.

"Don't touch me, Gramp. Right guys shouldn't dirty their hands on rats.

"I seen it, Blackie. You didn't know it was Willie till—"

"No, I didn't." Peyton unshipped his helmet and threw it clanging into a corner. He took a pitcher of water from the table, sloshed it over his head and down inside his body armor. "He didn't know it was me, either. But I sailed in to kill a stranger, and he stood off. That was the difference."

"You're no rat," Gramp said, helping to unlace the cuirass.

"I went with you to see the chief of the committee, Bengali. I declared myself in. Meanwhile, I figured to make a flash in the circus. I was going to ride both trains and figure which was the graviest for me."

Gramp was silent for a time. Finally he said:

"You've made up your mind our way. I know, or you wouldn't have admitted that much now."

Peyton kicked off the iron shoes. Clad only in shorts, he reached for a towel.

"Listen, Gramp, I feel trouble coming. Bengali is in it, too. I'll try to kick him free. But you're in the clear. Stay that way."

"I ain't scared!" argued Gramp, his beard bristling.

Peyton rubbed himself down.

"No, but you'll do more good if you aren't scooped up." He got into shoes, trousers and shirt. "I'm a rat, I said, but I've got right-guy blood in me somewhere. And these Airmen aren't even rats. They're cockroaches."

The door opened.

"Oh, are we cockroaches?" General Argyle sneered.

He came in. Four Airmen, all big and fierce looking, followed him. Bengali walked last, drawn of face.

"Get out of here," Argyle ordered Gramp.

"Guess I'd better, Blackie," said Gramp.

He left. Argyle closed the door after him.

"Are we cockroaches?" asked Argyle again.

Peyton skinned his teeth in the inverted smile.

"You are. All the winds in the world won't make butterflies out of you."

An Airman clenched a fist like a

twelve-pound show, but Argyle halted him with a gesture.

"Peyton, I asked you before the show if you knew Bengali."

"I told you I did. He sat in your box with me last week."

"And you haven't seen him since?"

"What would I be seeing him for?" Peyton's eyes insulted Bengali. "I club with men, not orchids."

"Bring in that other captive," Argyle ordered.

One of the Airmen opened the door and beckoned. The hook-nosed man who had met Peyton in the Underways bar came in. Argyle addressed the old sailor, pointing to Peyton:

"This is the man who drank with you and spoke against the Airmen?"

"Yes."

Argyle pointed to Bengali.

"What about this one?"

The sailor studied Bengali and shook his head.

"Isn't he the man who stays in the back office of that bar sometimes?"

"I've never been in the back office."

"You can go," said Argyle. "You, too, Bengali. But both of you stay within reach of me."

AFTER they had left, Argyle locked the door.

"Peyton, you're mixed up in some revolutionary plot. I tried to give you an easy out today, in the show, but—"

"Yes," broke in Peyton harshly, "only I killed the things that were supposed to kill me. The crowd gave me life. I can't be killed, right?"

"Right," agreed the general. "But you can be half-killed." He sat on the edge on the dressing table. The four Airmen drew together in a group, glaring at Peyton. "Talk, or else."

"I'm through talking," said Peyton. "Cockroaches don't make good conversation. So come and try to 'or else' me."

Argyle looked at his companions and shrugged his shoulders. Two of them stepped forward on either side of Peyton, swung their fist at the same moment. He went into a ducking crouch, swift as a bobbin on a loom. Both swings missed. Peyton hit one of the attackers in the belly, kicked the other's shin and jumped away.

As the nearest man turned toward him, Peyton lashed out with his left. The turning head spun hard against his knuckles and the Airman sat down with a grunt. At once Peyton leaped upon the other. His fists made blurs in the air. He planted eight blows in the body and two in the face. The second attacker sprawled across the first man, who was groggily trying to rise.

Peyton set his back to a corner and laughed. He was actually glad that the fight had started.

"I once dared any two Airmen to fight me," he panted.

"There are more than two here," said Argyle.

The fallen men got to their feet. All four of the subordinate Airmen rushed at Peyton. He hit the foremost of them on the chin, weaved past him, hit another man twice in the face, then floored the one he had just struck with a fourth blow. The two hit the floor at once, but their comrades were at Peyton's back, hitting him repeatedly. His head rang with the blows.

He crouched low under his protecting arms, like a man trying to fend off bricks falling from a ruined wall. He turned and both belabored his face. Under the weight of many blows he fell. His nose and cheeks were covered with blood. "This is fun," he snarled, as he rolled over and got to his knees.

All four of them were upon him at once, kicking and buffeting. General Argyle had not moved from his perch on the table. He drew his long holder from a breast pocket, carefully inserted a cigarette and lighted it.

"He's had enough," he said. The four Airmen straightened up. Peyton lay on the floor, face down. Dizzy but game, he turned his battered body over and got slowly and painfully to his feet. His face and knuckles were bleeding.

"Who said I had enough?" he demanded thickly. "I'm not even warmed up yet."

"Peyton," said Argyle, "you're going to tell us who is leading the trouble-makers down in the Underways."

"All I'm going to tell you is that cockroaches are aristocrats compared with Airmen who have to have the odds of five against one!"

"I was wrong," Argyle sighed to his men. "He hasn't had enough after all."

VIOLENTLY they threw themselves upon Peyton. All of them were bigger than he. As they bunched close, they shut out all view of the walls, the floor, General Argyle. Their blows struck like alternate sledgehammers. He heard them grunt and snort with their efforts. Shriveling under that bombardment, he still kept his feet and made some sort of return. One man howled in pain as Peyton got home on his face.

Three or four minutes, longer than eons, went by. From far off, General Argyle yelled, "Stand easy!" and they fell back from him on all sides.

He was going down. He knew he had kept on his feet only because the flying fists on all sides had held him there. Now he collapsed heavily. He felt as if he would come apart at the joints. Blood was all over him.

One of the Airmen turned him face up with a boot toe. Argyle stood over him, looking down cruelly.

"Are you going to talk?" he demanded.

He sounded as if he were far away on a faulty telephone. Peyton managed to shake his head from side to side.

"You were right about my not killing you, Peyton. The public wouldn't stand for it. But you won't get away from me. Tell me what I want to know and I'll send you to the prison hospital. After that you'll have only light confinement."

"And—if—I—don't?"

Argyle jerked his thumb downward, as he had done at the circus to signal the death of Willie Burgoyne.

"Back to the Pit!"

Atomic power was generated there. With knowledge of atomics, Bengali's committee might contend on equal terms with the Airmen—

"Below the Pit," Argyle said, "there's a deeper and tougher hole yet, where the prisoners go who are too tough for even the atom-smashery. Food's thrown down once a day. No lights. No beds. They mine ore to make inerton for the atomic containers. If they don't send up their quota, there's more misery. Start talking, or down you go."

Peyton tried to form words of defiance. He couldn't make his pulped lips respond. All he could do was stick out his tongue and make an unpleasant, scornful sound.

Argyle turned and opened his mouth to give an order. At that moment a remnant of strength woke in Peyton's mauled body. He dragged himself erect again, hit Argyle under the ear. Argyle reeled rubber-legged across the room and floundered against the wall.

At the same moment the last energy flowed out through those knuckles and Peyton fell, more limply than before. He could not see or feel, but he heard an Airman speak.

"He's out, cold as the end of a dog's nose."

"Pick him up, then," Argyle commanded. "The Pit's going to get him, and the Hole under the Pit."

If they touched him, Peyton did not know. He didn't know anything except a dream of the Flying Island and himself blowing it into bubbles with a handful of atomic power.

THE Hole below the Pit was blacker than space without stars. Nothing shone or made noise in the hollowed vestibule, until a trapdoor creaked high above and yellow lamplight stole down in a patch.

"Hello!" called a guard.

The door to the mine corridors opened. A phosphorescent face came into view, turning upward.

"What is it?" the face asked.

"You were three-quarters of a ton short on delivery yesterday. Eight tons today or you get tear gas for dinner."

The trapdoor slammed. The yellow light vanished. The convict spokesman went back into the gallery. Faces, hands and bare arms gave Pit glow enough to reveal a soot-colored tunnel of rock, outcropped with veins and mottlings that looked like black lead. Six convicts leaned on crowbars and shovels while the spokesman told what the guard had said.

"The six of us could dig eight tons," the biggest convict growled. "Five of us can't. That new guy is welshing, the one they sent down in a basket." He pointed with his crowbar at the bruised phosphorescence that was Blackie Peyton's face. "Listen, new guy.If you don't start heaving your weight down here, we'll stomp you."

"I've been stomped by experts," retorted Peyton. "I don't think you boys can do the job any better And I've dug as much as anybody here."

"That's a lie!"

"It's the truth. I've found native inerton, the stuff they use to make containers and motor linings for atomic power. I've peeled off enough sheets, in the five or six days I've been here, to clear us all out of this Hole."

"If we waste more time and get under our quota, we'll do without food and get a big whiff of tear gas to sleep on."

"Tear gas?" repeated Peyton. "That guard has tear gas bombs up there?"

"We've had it before."

"Swell!" Peyton cried. He went over to a little nook in the tunnel. From it he dragged something that looked like a big, rough megaphone, six feet long and tapering from a finger-wide mouthpiece to a two-foot bell. It was dull black and he had trouble lifting it. "This is what I've done with the inerton I found."

"If we broke that thing up and mixed it with rock and dirt," a convict said hurriedly, "it could make enough ore to—"

"Nobody breaks it up," stated Peyton. "This is a flying machine. It's crude, but it's inerton and it can fly. If it has atomic."

He took from a pocket of his soiled trousers a dark cylinder, also of inerton, about as large as a pistol cartridge. At sight of it, the other convicts shrank away.

"Don't handle that carelessly," warned one.

"I know what I'm doing," Peyton said. "I came down here to do it. Yeah, I let them put me down here, so I could get my hands on inerton and atomic and take them away. I had to be brought down on a stretcher, but I got enough strength to reach out and steal this from a dump we passed."

He slid the cylinder of atomic into the small upper end of his cone. "She can fly now. Who wants to come up with me? I've got a crashout all planned."

"Nothing doing," growled the big convict. "We wouldn't have a chance. They'd kill us all."

"You want to stay down here forever?"

"No. . . ."

"Rest of you feel that way?" There was no reply, only a general fidgeting. Peyton's gleaming lip curled. "Then I'll go alone. Why should I drag any excess baggage?"

The other convicts went into a huddle. One argued that Peyton's escape would be charged against them, with resultant penalization. Peyton broke this discussion off.

"You seem to think that life's sweet, even here. I don't. See this?" He pried the bit of atomic from its lodging in the cone's end. "It has just container enough to hold it when it's carefully handled. Monkey with me and I'll drop it and we'll all be through with our troubles."

Nobody spoke. With cone and cylinder, Peyton backed toward the door that led to the recess beneath the trap. He opened it, went through and closed the door behind him.

The light of his face was barely enough for him to see by, but he managed. Setting the cone on the floor, its tip pointing toward the place where the trapdoor would be, he drew his thumbnail sharply across one end of the little cylinder of atomic. With orderly haste he set it in the tip of the cone, scratched-end down, and fastened it there with a piece of the metal. Then he threw his arms around the upper part of the cone.

Something hissed, like escaping air. The cone stirred, rose. He clung with all his strength and even then was almost dislodged. The speed of the rising cone was something more than an elevator, something less than a bullet. Peyton saw the trapdoor above, ducked his head and let the cone-tip strike and hurl the trap open.

He rose like a pheasant into a yellow-lighted chamber, narrow and dingily lighted. As the cone drew him clear of the trap, Peyton let go and fell clumsily, but on his feet. He faced a guard, whose utter amazement made him helpless. Peyton hit the guard in the face, in the belly and in the face again. Guard and cone both clattered down onto the floor.

XI

PEYTON flung himself down beside the stunned man, clawing at round objects dangling from his belt. They were thin metal containers of tear gas. He rose, went to a box-shaped radio that gave two-way communication with upper levels. A couple of kicks wrecked it. He walked quickly to a metal door marked "Decompression Chamber."

Inside, he set the slack-off mechanism and, as once before, took a shower. It felt good. After a long enough wait, he went out the other side, completely nude and carrying only the gas bombs. Before he closed the exit door behind him, he tossed in a bomb. It burst in the decompression chamber. He smiled. Nobody would chase after him until the tear gas had dissipated.

He went to the elevator to the next level and paused to smash another radio box beside it. A uniformed guard in the elevator cage ripped out an oath of amazement. Peyton faced him, a gas bomb poised.

"Don't move!" he cautioned in a deadly voice. "Come out here and reel off that uniform."

The guard obeyed. Taking the uniform, Peyton entered the elevator and sent it upward. While it ascended, he got into the clothes. They were not a bad fit. All he needed was a truculent swagger to complete his disguise as a petty prison employee.

At each level he passed through a decompression chamber, rode up in the elevator beyond. Each chamber he turned into a pursuit obstacle by dropping one of his gas bombs. Each radio set he destroyed. One or two guards whom he passed looked up, nodded, but did not challenge him.

He permitted himself to feel a little easier.

At the eleventh level he paused. There, he knew, a freight elevator was constantly being loaded with atomic. He sought it, unobtrusively joined the group of lesser guards and prison trusties who were transferring metal cases full of inerton cylinders from a great stack to a car. So careful were they, and so engrossed in handling their fearful load, that he had no trouble in filling his pockets with small cylinders ranging in size from pistol-cartridge to pint-bottle. Eventually he strolled away to an elevator marked "To Outer Grounds."

It arose, carrying him straight to the surface. The change in pressure was somewhat unpleasant, but not distressing. Outside it was night, a little chilly, with a sky full of stars. Near him he heard the voice of the subway kiosk:

"New York subway here."

In that direction he turned his steps.

GRAMP HOOKER came to the door of the shabby saloon among the pilings of the Underways, carrying a mug of

beer. He peered through the dim light at a man in uniform who stood there.

"You came here asking after me?" queried Gramp. "Is this an arrest? You ain't got anything on me—"

The uniformed man snatched off his low-drawn cap. Gramp dropped the mug.

"Blackie!" he exclaimed. "Get that cap back on. Every Airman and Airman's jackal is after you. They know you escaped early tonight and this place is full of snitchers. I'm not important, a screwy old man. They don't bother me, but—"

"Get me into that office with Bengali," said Peyton.

"He isn't here. Follow me."

Gramp led the way along the street to a sideway, little more than a trail among the masses of pillars that crossed it. Boldly he squeezed in among the pillars themselves. Peyton, close behind, saw that some of the upright posts bore rough marks, like trail-blazes on the trees of a forest.

Deep in this maze, Gramp lifted his voice in a quavering hoot, like that of an owl. It was answered. Gramp plunged forward to a gravelike depression among the pilings, in which sat Bengali, no longer elegant and immaculate, over a small fire in a tin can. Bengali jumped up and seized Peyton's hand.

"You did what we hoped—hit for the bar and found Gramp!" he said. "How did you get away from that prison?"

"Too long a story," replied Peyton. "You still have a chance to lick the Airmen?"

"It's now or never. Argyle is going to jump up to the Flying Island at noon for a showdown with Torridge."

Peyton whistled. "Just like that, huh?"

"He knows there's an uprising brewing and wants to be in the saddle before it happens. Otherwise, as New York's chief general, he'll have to stick here and put it down. Once he's running things, he'll be set for anything. And if he fails, if Torridge wins, then Torridge will be so careful and tough that we'd be doomed at our first move. It's now or never, and I think it's never."

"Cut that out!" piped Gramp. "Here's Blackie and he's up to something. Right, Blackie?"

"Right. Bengali, you said once that you had experimental motors that could be flown with atomic."

"I have, twelve of them. We have no planes—the Airmen hold those—but on a high level is a museum with some old models that're in good condition. We could fit the motors into them."

"How about pilots? The only ones who know how to fly are Airmen—"

"The devil you say!" snorted Gramp. "When I was a kid, my dad carried me down to Kitty Hawk to watch the Wright boys mizzle that box-kite of theirs around. First World War, I shot six Heinies out from in back of Richthofen himself. In Nineteen-twenty-seven, if I hadn't gone on a drunk, I might have been the first man across the Atlantic, instead of Lindbergh. I flew and fought in China, Ethiopia, Spain, Greece, Libya. And if I'd had sense enough to dye my hair and lie about my age twenty years ago, I'd have been in the Third World War and a big Airman today."

He shook his knobbed finger under Peyton's nose.

"Listen, I've fought and flown jalopies that these Airmen couldn't even roll out of the hangar."

"That answers me, I guess," Peyton laughed.

"But what I lack is atomic power," mourned Bengali. "I haven't any to give Gramp for a flight."

"As Gramp says, the devil you say! Look what else escaped from stir."

Gingerly Peyton began to empty his pockets. . . .

The aeronautical section of the museum was lofty and spacious, full of archaic aircraft. To one side was a wall made up of window glass, now black with the night outside. From the ceiling hung a frail fabric of hickory lath and

silk, such as Gramp Hooker called a box-kite. Below it stood a dull lead-colored plane, with steel-faced wings and fuselage. Against another wall were ranged several small fighters of by-gone wars. Nothing in that exhibit dated any later than 1948.

ACROSS the threshold sprawled the gray-uniformed night watchman, twitching and moaning softly where a sweeping blow of Peyton's padded length of lead pipe had spilled him. Gramp, entering beside Peyton, looked with beady eyes at the fallen man, then knelt to tie him.

"Gosh, what technique!" Gramp exclaimed.

Bengali and the others, carrying the inerton motors, moved past with admiring side glances.

"Peyton's a past master at his art," Bengali agreed.

"Get your blow in first, eh?"

"First, second, third, fourth and all the way," Peyton said. "This lad and the one we rushed at the door ought to be the only opposition in this wing. Now we've got the place to ourselves and it's not midnight yet."

The motors, each about as big as a two-gallon pail, were stacked together. Bengali had also brought a canvas bag, which he now opened, revealing black powder.

"I made it myself," he explained. "Some of you go into the gun room. Bring all the old muzzle-loaders that have flintlocks in good condition. We have no percussion caps. Peyton, I thought I'd have good news for you, but it's bad."

"Bad?" echoed Peyton. "What about?"

"About your friend Thora. I hoped to bring her here. I knew that she and you—"

"How did you know?"

"She told me that—and much more. After you were carried off to prison, she came and gave me information. On what she's told, I've based most of my findings about Argyle's planned coup. Argyle, with every armed plane, will go up in the stratosphere at noon tomorrow and board the Island. The Airmen on duty here are behind him."

"You started to talk about Thora," Peyton reminded him harshly.

"She became one of us. I went to get her before meeting you to rush the museum guards. She's gone."

"Gone?" Peyton clutched Bengali by the front of his coat. "Gone where?"

"I don't know. I don't think Argyle knows, either. I understand he's got an order out for her to be brought in, dead or alive. I'm sorry, Peyton."

Peyton's eyes slitted. "She's in with us, you say. She's where neither you nor Argyle can find her. That means she's up to a game of her own, something in connection with this uprising, and something she's doing alone. She's all right, Bengali. I'm sure of it. And I'm not going to waste valuable time worrying. She needs us to work along with her."

GRAMP joined them.

"Say, he reported, "we're out of luck."

"How?" Bengali asked.

"These planes have been kept in good shape, but I don't trust the fabric jobs with an atomic motor. There's just two metal scows, small cockpit jobs, that might do. Ain't a very big fleet."

"It's enough to land two or three of us on the Island," said Peyton, "and that ought to be enough."

His companions gaped in amazement.

"Not enough to carry the place by storm, maybe," he explained swiftly, "but enough to win it by brains. You said I was a great one for getting my licks in first, but that's not the only way to win a fight. Did you ever hear about making the other guy throw a punch, then ducking and countering while he misses? That's the way to handle these Airmen. If—"

"Sounds too complicated," objected Gramp.

"Yes, so don't waste time explaining,"

seconded Bengali. "Peyton, you see a chance to do this job. I don't. I'm going to hand over command to you, here and now. Work fast, man!"

"What are you standing around for, Gramp?" cried Peyton. "Put motors in those two planes. Pick out the best pilot from among these old vets you've gathered. Load up with atomic and stand by to take off." Gramp saluted with a grin, and hurried to obey. "Bengali, how many men have you got that you can count on?"

"Eight hundred, maybe a thousand, down in the Underways where I can put a hand on them."

"If they're tough enough, with a few weapons it ought to be plenty. How often have you watched the Flying Island go over?"

Bengali stared strangely.

"Not often. You get used to it."

"You do—I don't. Bengali, I've watched it go over every day during the two weeks I've been out. That Island made a big dent in my mind. I've not only watched it go over New York, but I've watched it go away. I've followed the shadow on the trees, the landscape. Where's a map of this part of the country?"

Bengali still stared, but pointed toward another part of the museum.

"That room ought to be full of old ones."

They went together. Peyton tore open a showcase and took out a hard-wide map of what used to be New York's metropolitan area. He did mental arithmetic half-aloud.

"Seven hundred miles an hour—seventy miles in six minutes—thirty-five in three. That ought to be time and distance enough." He laid his finger on a point on the map. "You know what place this is?"

Bengali studied it. "The map says Lake Hopatcong, but—"

"I know. Nobody goes there any more. Well, it's twelve hours till the Flying Island arrives. You're going to march your men there in those twelve hours. Take this map and get started." He thrust the paper into Bengali's hand. "Be ready for trouble, too."

"Won't you give me some idea?" Bengali pleaded.

"This much. You'll do it if I promise that Argyle and Torridge and their followers will be there, shaken up and off balance for you to fight. You're spoiling for a chance like that. Get going while you have time. This map and a compass will help. I'll be seeing you!"

He gave Bengali a push, and then went to where Gramp supervised the changing of the motors. Another grizzled man, whose name was Wertz, had been chosen to pilot the second plane. Someone had brought oxygen tanks and masks.

"Just what we need," approved Peyton, inspecting the masks. "Now, is there a parachute in the house?"

Wertz found one.

"Put it on, Wertz. I'm loading all the extra atomic cylinders into your second cockpit."

Wertz shrugged. "Suit yourself. You're boss. But if my plane cracks up. . . ."

"I want it to crack up," Peyton told him. "You'll aim it at a target I show you, then bail out. Yours is the easiest job of all." He raised his voice. "Wertz, Gramp Hooker, stand by your planes! The rest of you, go with Bengali. He'll lead you to the best fighting you've ever had!"

They departed and he faced the two pilots.

"Attention to orders. I won't take a minute. Then we'll stand easy until dawn. As the sun comes up, we'll fly right out through those big windows yonder."

"We're listening," said Gramp. "And it better be good, Blackie."

XII

FAR in the stratosphere, with a serge-blue sky overhead and a cloud-misted Earth below, rode the Flying

Island. Those who had fashioned it had worked with the lightest and strongest of metals and other materials.

First a traylike base of aluminum, a mile across and many yards thick. Upon this, like a multitude of masts upon a strange and intricate ship, countless hollow towers and spires of alloy, faced with gold-leaf for rustproofing and show. Rigged and braced with struts, wires and cables; supported among these, like bubbles among mash weeds, clustered glass chambers of all sizes and shapes. These, despite the tinting and clouding against the sun's rays, gave off rainbow flashes in all directions.

The largest chambers, centrally located, housed the mighty atomic engines that kept the Island constantly flying. Others contained the compressor pumps that laboriously turned the stratosphere into breathable air. There were storerooms for food and other supplies, and, in the outer and upper tiers, hangars for aircraft. Elsewhere were tiers of dormitories and living quarters, but these were occupied less frequently than any other chambers.

For in 1980 there were but twenty-thousand Airmen to rule the world. Not even twenty-thousand supermen can be everywhere at once. Most of them filled police and command posts in the ring of the cities around Earth, but three thousand were always needed upon the Flying Island.

For the sake of survey, co-ordination, and to subject unprotesting millions, it must circle the globe once a day. It was a symbol, a threat, a legend, but it was also the most costly device in all the history of despotic government.

The towers were filled with watchers. Relaxation by one man of a single degree of alertness might cause the whole unwieldy mass to lose balance, topple and crash. Squadrons of observers must scan the empty sky, the misted Earth. Others must check gauges, altimeters, feeds, level devices. Still others, a thousand at a time, must feel, service and direct the intricate mass of flying machinery with perfect precision and care.

Without the make-up used during television appearances, Marshal Torridge was gray-templed, wan-faced, wrinkle-browed. His thin body was fragile inside its splendid uniform. Standing in a great central watch tower, peering through binoculars at a great port, he bit his mustached lip.

"Planes coming," he said to his two aides. "Flock of them. Every plane in the New York contingent. The girl who sneaked up here told the truth."

"It's Argyle, sir, attacking us?"

"Naturally it's Argyle. Who else could it be? And it must be an attack, as she said. No planes here in our hangars except bombers, eh?"

The aides shook their heads. For twenty years nobody had dreamed of conflict with other planes. Only punishment or reprisal was ever thought of, and then for a city of Earth, a defenseless bomb target.

"Then," ordered Torridge, "gather and arm all who are off duty. Let the rebels board. We don't want them bombing us. Let them show their hands. They'll expect us to be unready, but we won't be."

The aides moved swiftly away. Torridge looked at a chronometer. Half an hour, he judged, until those silver-bright wasps landed. By then they'd be just above New York City. Wonders could be done in that time. He turned to a glass table and pressed the switch on a radio communicator.

"Bring in that female prisoner."

AN AIRMAN in captain's uniform brought in Thora. She was paler than ever, but not frightened, and stood before them proudly, her frosty blonde hair a little unkempt, but her green eyes did not flinch.

The marshal gestured her guard away.

"Young woman, when you stowed away on the New York supply craft yesterday and rushed into my presence with that bizarre story about danger of

my overthrow, I was too preoccupied with your impudence in coming where we never allow ground people, and have never before admitted a woman. I called you a fool and a liar and had you confined." His tired eyes turned again in the direction whence came Argyle's swarm of wasps. "Now I find that I was wrong. Why did you steal a ride up here at risk of your life, to warn me?"

"Now that you believe, I'll explain," she replied. "General Argyle wants to supplant you as world ruler. He has put a certain man into prison. My hope is that this service will be repaid by giving that man freedom."

"A man in prison?" repeated Torridge. "Dangerous?"

"Probably the most dangerous man of all the ground people," said Thora proudly. "Dangerous, I mean, to you. He's a born and bred rebel. He feels outraged and murderous. The very name 'Airman' drives him into a fury. I ask you not to let that count. I have helped you. Now help me, and—the man I love."

"You rely heavily on my sense of gratitude," observed Torridge. "I have none. Rulers cannot indulge in such luxuries. I should really be opening a trap in the floor of this Island and throwing you through it." He glanced again in the direction of Argyle's fleet. "You're an unusual person. You know what you want, certainly, and no nonsense."

"I wish," said Thora, "that I could say the same for you and the rest of the Airmen."

Torridge stared in a manner that should have frozen her lips, but it did not succeed.

"Don't you think," she burst out, "that everyone knows what a farce this Flying Island is? You're desperate, overworked. The burden of world empire is too much for you. Marshal Torridge, you're an old man!"

"Old?" cried the greatest man on Earth. "I was old at thirty, when the War ended. I was ancient at forty, when the previous marshal died of heart strain and I replaced him. I'm fifty now, and prehistoric. If it gives you any satisfaction, I want nothing so much as to quit."

"What is there to hang on to?" demanded Thora. "You distrust and fear your subject peoples, so you must engross them with bloody circus spectacles. You must import strange beasts for slaughter, when ordinary comforts are impossible to get. You squeeze millions into cities like jails, and you stay up here as their jailer. You're a rider on a wild horse. You want to get off, but don't dare for fear you'll have your ribs kicked in. And that is due to happen. Argyle's almost upon you. I can see his planes clearly."

"My rule may be crumbling," agreed Torridge. "Stand by and watch my attempts to prop it up."

The wasp swarm of Argyle's planes approached the Flying Island. Argyle, his plane central in the formation, spoke into his radio.

"Hello, hangars! This is General Argyle. Prepare to help us land."

No response, but the hangars were open, big bottle-like chambers. The planes flew in and came to rest. No attendants stood there. Wondering, some of the pilots emerged and touched the buttons that would close the doors and admit breathable air.

Argyle, whose original plan had been to make prisoners of the hangar attendants, had to change his plans now. He assembled his men in a main crystal-walled promenade just inside. Five hundred planes had brought two thousand men. They were all armed, as Torridge's men would not be. He conferred with a brace of lieutenants.

"Remember that they outnumber us, but most of them can't leave their posts. Whatever happens, this Island has to keep flying. What we want, chiefly, is Torridge. Don't capture him. Kill him. Then his boys will have to come in with us."

"Argyle!" cried Torridge's voice.

FROM the far end of the corridor, where a deeper glass-clouding made something like a shadow, the voice echoed to the growing group of invaders. Argyle faced it, saw a slender, richly uniformed figure.

"This is luck!" he whispered. "There he is, come to meet us all by himself." From among those nearest to him he selected the dozen men he came fairly close to trusting. "Come on. Don't draw guns until I speak. We're going to wipe out Torridge here and now." He and his party moved toward the marshal. "Glad you came out, sir. How did you know it was I?"

"A stowaway came up from New York yesterday," said Torridge. "A blonde, pale girl, with a fantastic yarn about how you planned to overthrow me."

The tones were genial, but Argyle started and chewed on his cigarette holder. Was Torridge informed and ready? If so, why was he here alone and apparently unprotected?

"I know that girl, sir," Argyle improvised quickly. "She's insane. The fact that she came up here as a stowaway proves that. She knows what happens to ground people who disobey orders."

"Never fear, Argyle. I have her safe," assured Torridge.

They were quite close now. At a stealthy motion from Argyle, the party came to a halt not more than twenty yards away. Not one of them but could kill with a snap pistol shot at that range. Argyle saluted and Torridge returned the salute. His gay uniform seemed to shimmer. z

"Marshal Torridge," said Argyle heavily, I came to make an important statement."

"Ah," breathed Torridge, "does that statement happen to be that you intend to overthrow and replace me, Argyle? Because I disagree with you that the girl we mentioned is insane. I take her for very sane indeed, and so I have prepared for you."

"Draw your pistols!" Argyle rasped. "Cover him!"

A dozen weapons swept from their holsters, focused on Marshal Torridge. He did not flinch, move to retreat or resist. One eyebrow lifted. A slender hand slid a monocle under it.

"Now you expose your hand, Argyle," he taunted. "I am glad. My preparations have not been in vain. I can fight and kill you with the most cheerful of hearts."

"Fire!" roared Argyle.

The pistols all boomed together. Every bullet must have struck the target, yet Torridge only smiled. He shrugged.

"I see that a simple device has baffled you, Argyle."

"Then take this!"

Argyle threw a grenade, powered with a crumb of atomic power. As it whirled through the air, every man of his party fell on his face for safety. The grenade's explosion shook and rang the glass chamber. Silence, and then Torridge's quiet laugh.

Argyle scrambled erect. Torridge stood where he had been standing, not at all disturbed.

"I'm not really here, Argyle. I'm in my command post. A television ray focus, with the dust motes of the air as screen, places my image where you shoot at it, and a television return shows you to me. You've often seen me thus at the circus and elsewhere, but in your single-minded greed for conquest you didn't stop to think." Torridge's voice grew grim. "If you want to fight now, I am ready to accommodate you. Winner takes the Island and the power and the glory. Loser takes a long drop and a long long rest."

"Prepare for action!" Argyle bawled. "Run back to the others, some of you. Deploy, hold these outer chambers and corridors—"

Another explosion seemed to smash the great fabric of glass and metal. Argyle heard the roar of escaping air, tried to run to safety somewhere. A moment later he collapsed, panting and

wheezing and strangling. His swimming brain presented him a strange vision—the face of Blackie Peyton. Then he subsided into senseless darkness.

XIII

HIGH up against the sun, hidden in the torrent of its beams, Gramp and Peyton watched from their cockpit as Wertz carried out orders. The Flying Island, swimming in from the east, had been met and swarmed over by Argyle's air legion. So intent upon triumph had Argyle been that he did not look for, even if he could see, any third party in the sky.

The two makeshift stratosphere craft went undiscovered as the Flying Island drew into position a few minutes from New York. Then Wertz dived. Gramp and Peyton saw him bail out in his parachute, a figure no larger than a spider in respirator and rags. The plane struck among the rainbow bubble chambers and the Island rocked with the mighty discharge of its cargo of atomic cylinders. Among the towers appeared a jagged hole.

Gramp went into a dive. So swift did the great, soaring Island travel that it had already slid from under the downward plunge of Wertz's parachute.

"He'll land somewhere on Long Island," observed Gramp at the controls. "By the time he finds his way home, it'll be all settled."

Peyton said nothing, strapped his own oxygen mask in place. The Island blotted out the faraway world below. Gramp sent them smoothly into the hole made by the explosion. They smacked home between two high towers, felt the crunch of their craft as it broke up, quickly scrambled out. They stood on the dangerously cracked and shattered floor of half a corridor, inside what had once been the outer tier of glass hangars. Around them was cluttered the wreckage of many metal planes.

Peyton felt puffy. His ears roared. For twenty years he had dwelt under the pressure of the Pit. Now he moved clumsily over broken glass in the scant pressure of the stratosphere. Gramp was beside him, pulling at his elbow and pointing ahead.

The punctured corridor was full of struggling, smothering Airmen, trying to fight their way through transparent doors into the breathable interior. Many were falling and collapsing. Gramp paused to snatch a pistol from a holster, and Peyton did the same. They ran along the corridor.

The interior of the Island could be seen through many glass partitions. Men and machines moved back there. Peyton, faint despite his oxygen mask, gained a doorway and reached for the catch. But Gramp caught his arm again, pointing to a fallen figure.

It was General Argyle.

They bent, caught him up and between them hurried him through the door they had found. The pressure of inner air slammed it shut behind them. Breathing heavily, Argyle partially recovered. He tried to rise from the crystal floor, but Peyton pinned him down with one foot. He and Gramp ripped off their masks.

"We haven't any time to lose," rapped Peyton. "Where's the control machinery?"

Argyle blinked up at him.

"This is silly. You can't be Peyton! You—"

Peyton hoisted him erect and dug the stolen pistol into his belly.

"The controls. Tell us where they are!"

"Shoot me," dared Argyle. "Ground people can't order Airmen around."

Peyton and Gramp had the same impulse. They seized Argyle and rushed him along a corridor, past rival detachments of Airmen who were sniping at each other. Somewhere resounded the hiss and throb of a mighty atomic power mechanism. Heading for it, they slipped and went down a ramp, all three together. Argyle fought for a gun, but Gramp

pistol-whipped him.

They got to their feet just outside the biggest chamber yet—a domed apartment as big as an old-fashioned metropolitan station. Tier above tier rose the machinery that held and drove the gigantic vehicle. The door was locked. They shot it open with bullets and charged through.

"Here's what we want," said Gramp. He covered a wan Airman just inside. "Up with your hands, or I drill you."

"You can't do this," protested the Airman. "I steer. This television—"

Gramp stared at the little screen, shouldered the man away. Peyton, holding the bewildered Argyle with one hand, caught the television steersman with the other. Gramp put his hands on two levers that were like bicycle handlebars. They responded delicately to his touch.

"These must keep an even keel," he decided. "I see New York in the screen. Are we just above her?"

"Of course," babbled their new prisoner. "Who are you? What's all the noise about?"

"Argyle and his stooges are trying to take this Island away from you," Peyton informed him. "Neither side is going to have it. We're landing you."

"Landing us?" echoed the steersman in terror. "But you—you can't!" He raised his voice. "Help! Help!"

Peyton saw that the chamber and its machinery-lined floors swarmed with Airmen. Several looked up. A number trembled at their work. But none answered the appeal. They dared not leave their tasks.

"Six minutes beyond New York, you say, Blackie?" queried Gramp. "Here's a map with the course marked. This lake—"

"That's the one," said Peyton. "Think you can make this white elephant land there?"

"I can make her stop flying," replied Gramp. "That's enough, eh?"

The steersman snatched at Peyton's pistol. Peyton shot him in the kneecap and he fell sobbing. Then Peyton forced Argyle down on a bench of glass and tubular steel. The sound of battle was growing muffled outside. Someone bustled in. Peyton recognized Marshal Torridge.

"What has happened?" burst out Torridge. "Who are you men?"

"Sit down beside Argyle, there," Peyton ordered. "We're going to take you down to Earth."

Gramp was tugging upon a great lever that was wired to a metal bulkhead.

"Careful!" screamed Torridge. "That is the power cut-off! If you pull it down—"

"That's all I wanted to know," announced Gramp.

An expanse of water showed on the vision screen. He ripped the lever from its fastenings and forced it to the floor. Instantly all the machinery was dead and silent.

The Flying Island was flying no more. Down it drifted, like a falling leaf. Peyton felt light on his feet. It was as though he rode in a swiftly descending elevator. Fifteen miles down! He fancied that the time would pass quickly. Sixteen feet the first second, thirty-two the next, sixty-four the third—

"Spin that wheel gauge!" Torridge thundered at Gramp. "You want us to smash up?"

GRAMP spun the device indicated, then faced Torridge.

"You mean this will let us down easy? Some kind of brake blast below, eh?" He turned a quizzical eye on Peyton. "What do you think of that, Blackie?"

Their fall was slowing. The men who had labored at the machines now deserted their posts and converged on the little group at the controls. Their faces were deadly. Gramp averted the new disaster.

He leveled his gun at Torridge.

"Stand easy, every one of you!" he shrilled. "Rush us and I let the marshal have it right through the brain!"

Peyton saw men rushing from without. He covered Argyle.

"No funny business from the other side!" he warned. "If there is, Argyle will be the first to die."

They descended in grim silence through many hundred yards of space.

"This is a trifle swift to follow," said Torridge finally. "I take it that you two aren't part of Argyle's raid."

"Not we," Peyton assured him. "And not part of your defense, either. We come from the ground."

"Ground!" muttered Argyle. "I should have known it would happen! Ungrateful scum, rising against us—"

"As you rose against me," put in Torridge. "There aren't enough Airmen for a difference of opinion, Argyle. If you had been content to stay on as commander at New York, probably you would have taken my place in a very short while. As it is, we're both through." He sighed. "I feel tired."

"The ground people did this to me!" raged Argyle. "First Thora, bearing tales to you; now these two renegades! And what's happening down below?"

The question was rhetorical. Nobody bothered to answer it. From the packed observers a voice spoke.

"Marshal Torridge, say the word and we'll rush these pirates!"

"Rush nobody," directed Torridge, relaxing on the bench beside Argyle. "Gentlemen, I think we are assisting at the end of an era. Our safety mechanism will keep us from smashing below, but once it's down, this Island will never fly again. That means the finish of the Airmen."

"I'm glad you realize that," said Gramp.

"I won't admit it!" snapped Argyle. "Torridge, we have one more chance. Let's join forces. When we come down, we'll march into New York somehow, crush whatever silly rebellion these two represent—"

"How crush it?" inquired Torridge gently. "As I understand it, all your planes came up to help in the stroke against me. They will not be damaged, but the impact of landing will certainly set off all the atomic energy they still contain. Until more is brought them, they are useless. And I feel certain that without planes we will fail to subjugate New York."

"You admit defeat at the hands of ground-grubbers?" exploded Argyle.

For answer, Torridge gestured toward Peyton and Gramp.

"Here are two of that gentry who have brought both our forces to nothing," he said. Once more he yawned and spoke to Peyton. "Will you be amazed to hear that I begin to feel relief?"

Peyton shook his head. "You look worn out to me. Now that you know the job of flying this Island is off your hands, maybe you'd like to stretch out and take a nap."

TORRIDGE looked wistful. "I'd better stay awake and see the finish. It will be a great joke on the person left in the position of victor. Do you realize, gentlemen, that with the ruling out of this Flying Island, the whole fabric of our government is at an end?"

"I'm glad you admit that," said Peyton.

"I would be fatuous to admit otherwise. You must understand this much. The Island was a needle that drew a daily thread through the necklace of Earth's cities. They are now just so many spilled beads. Each has masses of people and a contingent of Airmen in command, who will not know what happened elsewhere. Some of our planes could span the distances between the cities, but I doubt if any of our pilots are trained highly enough to make it. Each community is cut off from all the others."

"Speak for yourself, you Airmen," growled Gramp. "Who says nobody can navigate? I could fly anywhere a ship will take me, if I have a map and a compass and a quadrant. Why, fifty years ago—"

"You can!" Torridge pointed a finger

at Argyle, "There you have it. Our governing activities have forced us into narrow ruts. We lost skills and abilities and forgot that wise old men like this still existed."

Argyle was thinking of something else. Peyton's gun muzzle had drooped. Argyle gathered his booted feet under him and sprang. His tactics were copied from Peyton himself. His left hand caught Peyton's gun wrist. His right hand doubled into a bunch of knuckles and smote Peyton's jaw. A moment later he had twisted the gun away and was beating Peyton over the head with it.

"I win!" he yelled through the broken door. "This is Argyle! Come help, rebels!"

Somebody rushed in, somebody slender and with streaming blond hair. Thora, forgotten in the confusion, had escaped from her prison. She caught Argyle around the neck from behind. Argyle struggled desperately. A moment later Peyton wrenched himself free and walloped the general. Argyle wilted down through Thora's arms.

She turned an utterly bewildered face from one person to another.

"Whatever is happening?" she begged. "Outside there was a fight starting. Airmen were rushing around, yelling at each other 'For Torridge or Argyle?' and then shooting. Now they're all crouched in corners, behind furniture, with their eyes bulging out."

"They know what you fail to realize," Torridge informed her. "The Flying Island has finished its flight. It is settling down to rest like a tired bird. . . ." He glanced at an instrument board. "That gauge says we are ready to land now."

And land they did, with an abrupt shock and a mighty splash, in the shallow waters of Lake Hopatcong. Few kept their feet. Peyton and Thora sat down suddenly, clinging to each other. Gramp clung to the handlebar levers, maintaining his upright position.

"How's that for landing a contraption I never even handled before?" he piped in shrill triumph. "All I did was keep the lake in the vision screen and—"

Peyton got up.

"Outside," he warned loudly, "will be my men—a large force, armed and ready. If you do as I say, nobody will be hurt. Drop your arms here and march out with your hands up. Wade to the shore and give yourselves up."

Blank faces regarded him on all sides. Marshal Torridge spoke with animation for the first time.

"Don't you hear what your new commanding officer says? Do what he tells you. Down weapons, up hands, march out—lively!"

XIV

BENGALI, pallid and weary, dismissed the last fumbling and fuming work committee from his office. It was a fine office in the same building that housed the Pardon Board, vastly different from the hidden den behind the Underways bar, or the gravelike hiding among the pilings. One more person entered. Bengali sighed and smiled.

"Come in, Blackie," he said. "You're the first man I've been glad to see today. The fighting's over, but the figuring's only started."

"That fighting was a disappointment," commented Peyton, sitting down. "You face something big and tough, thinking you'll die game. But after a couple of licks, it keels over. It was like a dream."

"Right. And the figuring's like another kind of dream. You run into something small and slender and harmless, and all of a sudden it swells up into tremendous trouble. I think I'd throw it over, Blackie, if they'd let me."

He referred to his notes.

"The representations to other towns, for instance. I put that in the hands of Gramp Hooker. He'll fly a plane to lead the way around the world, where the Flying Island used to sail. Torridge—thank heaven we saved him alive—will

confer with the administrators in each town as they come to it. I can imagine how hard the idea will be to communicate."

"Nothing to how hard it will be to sell," returned Blackie Peyton. "Speaking of Torridge, you're beginning to look like him yourself—worn out and jumpy."

"He hated government business. Anybody who does that isn't bad at bottom, no matter how fancy a uniform he wears. It's the men who love glory and power, like Argyle, who are to be feared and fought. About the other towns—people will be glad to hear about it, once it trickles through. We can go slowly in introducing the world to freedom. Better slow than never."

Peyton smiled savagely.

"Speaking of Argyle, do me a favor, will you? Send him down into the Pit to smash atoms."

"Never a chance," demurred Bengali. "There's a lever control machine that will do the work down there without manpower. The Airmen perfected it years ago, even installed it; but atom-smashing was too good a punishment to use for rebellious ground people. I've already ordered that mechanism to start."

"At least tell Argyle that he's headed for the Pit," urged Peyton. "The thought will be almost as tough on him as the work."

"I'll do that," Bengali said. He scribbled a note on a pad. "As for the currency situation—"

"Going to abolish money?" queried Peyton. "Most reformers want to."

AGAIN Bengali shook his head, saying quietly:

"There's a group of executives and experts figuring it out. No manipulators or gamblers. They're blocking out a plan to base exchange values on labor and commodities, not on any metal that, taken alone, is worth nothing. Money's no good if you can't buy things with it, and an honest government doesn't need a guarantee. We plan to be a really honest government."

"Too deep for me," confessed Peyton. He helped himself from a cigarette box in front of Bengali. "Hey, these are real tobacco!"

"Everybody will have real tobacco before long," Bengali told him. "Real coffee, too, and those other things you missed." Wertz had tramped in. Bengali resumed, nodding at Wertz, "We're putting him in charge of a fleet of big atomic-powered air vessels to go South after such things. What can't be found growing wild will be planted for harvest next year."

He picked up more scribbled notes. "Now give me advice."

"What about?"

"That girl, Thora. She's applied for a job."

PEYTON had put the cigarette into his mouth. He swiftly snapped it out again.

"Job? What kind of job?"

"We hope to reclaim the wilderness. The Airmen didn't want anything there before. They preferred to keep people in cities like this, or in nearby farms, easier to put a thumb on. But already people are demanding to get back to the land. I'm organizing a squad to send out to Jersey. We'll use that grounded Flying Island as a sort of living headquarters and supply house around which to clear land and plant crops. First we'll drop parachute men with axes to make a landing field. Later garden patches. Finally—"

"And Thora wants to go on that?" Peyton demanded. "That girl? She doesn't know the first thing about farming!"

"Thanks for those kind words, Mr. Peyton," said Thora, walking in from a rear office.

She wore a rich blue dress, but had pinned paper cuffs over the sleeves and stuck a pencil into her back hair. Her hands were full of papers.

"Here's a partial list of what I want

to fly in the first day, Bengali. We figure to be self-supporting the first season and show a profit the second. That is, if these volunteer farmers will really work." She studied Peyton, whose mouth had not closed after he had removed the cigarette. "As for Mr. Peyton, there—"

"Pierce to you, Thora," he told her.

"Miss Thora to you, Mr. Peyton. As for Mr. Peyton, since when did he get to know so much about farming as to suggest—"

"My dad was a farmer!" snapped Peyton.

"So was mine!" she flung back.

"Bengali," said Peyton to the man at the desk, "cross her off the list and give me that farm detail. I can run it. You know I can handle workers and that I can be trusted."

"As if," said Thora icily, "I can't handle workers or be trusted."

Bengali was glancing from one to the other.

"I'm going to send you both out there," he said at last. "The fresh air and hard work will do you good. I don't want either of you moping here alone, and I don't want the two of you arguing here together. Now take your debate somewhere else. I'm going to be busy all day, and all night."

THORA hurried into the rear room. Peyton sprang after her. He caught her just outside the door.

"What idiot said you can trust no future?" he cried. "Thora, we'll make a future that we can trust."

"Let me go, Mr. Peyton," pleaded Thora in smothered tones. "This is no way to start a farming partnership. Let go, Peyton! Gramp, where are you? Why don't you take a hand in this and help to get me out of this wild man's clutches?"

Gramp, at a paper-littered desk of his own, goggled like a bearded king-fisher.

"Because I'm going on eighty-three," he replied. "Darn it!"

Keeps hair naturally well-groomed!

'Vaseline' Hair Tonic makes your hair look naturally neat—and keeps it looking neat! Why? Because it checks dry scalp—blends in with the natural oils in your hair!

Vaseline HAIR TONIC

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Relieves loose dandruff. It's economical, too — all you need is a few drops a day! Contains *no* alcohol or other scalp-drying ingredients. Try it!

Gadget Baghdad

By R. W. STOCKHEKER

Nobody could figure out how the clown got into the act—or what he was

THE red light indicated the No. 2 camera was on, but the master monitor inside the Studio D control booth was blithely ignoring that fact. Outside the glass-fronted booth the camera's optical system was picking up a blonde muscle dancer and transferring her flawlessly back through the image orthicon. But inside the booth the big screen

showed a mournful tramp clown in baggy pants who came gliding out of a swirling mist in a rag-tag, shuffling dance.

At the control console, Marv Delancey, Station KTOZ's top technical supervisor, gave a strangled groan when he sighted that dancing figure. He half turned, flicking a worried glance at Mr. Morgan. The director was glaring at the monitor, his face a rich mahogany red, an expression of profound bafflement clouding his eyes.

The first time this tiny phantom figure had slipped in to hijack the KTOZ megacycles Mr. Morgan had tossed a rousing tantrum. Now he appeared to have decided to wait in apoplectic silence until the intruding clown went away.

At the moment, however, little Mr. Yagi was definitely there. Throughout the KTOZ telecast area he was being duplicated on thousands of picture tubes. Thousands of audio systems were reproducing the flat, twanging hum with which he accompanied himself.

The tramp clown, his oversized shoes flapping, ended his rag-tag shuffle in a ducking bow. Then he doffed his battered hat. Lips drooping, eyes mirroring an ineffable sadness, he turned and swung the hat in a sweeping arc behind him, brushing an incredible montage on the mist. The montage revealed a crazy quilt pattern of spidery minarets and golden mosques, a pattern of bunting-draped bazaars and shadowy gardens where nude slave girls flitted under the watchful eyes of towering Mameluke guards.

It took a video engineer to appreciate that sequence, Marv thought uneasily. The montage couldn't have been tricked by any known combination of cameras, lighting or gimmick in the business. It was technically impossible—out of this world. He reached up and thumbed a phone button. His hand was trembling.

"Johnny," he said to the floor director, "our friend, Mr. Yagi, the megacycle moocher, is back. Try to keep things rolling."

The floor crew was well trained. They could throw away the script and build a new show from scratch if they had to. But on stage, Andy Cappa, the emcee, had caught that aberrant picture in the outside monitor. Now he was casting frantic glances toward the control booth.

Marv crossed his fingers. If the blonde muscle dancer noticed she was being deleted from the show, there was going to be a royal fission. D'Arcy had the temper of a mad bull elephant. She'd wrap a mike boom around the nearest cameraman's neck.

He selected a second phone button. "Liz," he said, "grab D'Arcy when she comes off. Tell her we ran out of time. Tell her she ripped her—uh, costume. Hustle her back to her dressing room and see she stays there."

He cut back to the floor director, not worrying about Liz. Liz was built like a professional bouncer and was born hating blondes. "No encore for D'Arcy, Johnny," he said. "Signal Andy Cappa he's to come in as soon as she finishes."

He watched D'Arcy take her bows and disappear into the wings with a soaring swoop. Then he cut in the ready camera for the zooming close-up of the emcee.

AS THOUGH his impromptu bit had been carefully timed to fit D'Arcy's spot, Mr. Yagi ducked his head and faded into the mist. Andy Cappa's toothy smile flashed back on the master monitor. Smoothly, without losing a syllable, the emcee ad libbed a fast bit to tie that off-beat skit into the show. You had, Marv thought gratefully, to hand it to these ex-burlesque comedians; they were certainly fast on their wits.

He leaned back, conscious of a vicious throbbing in his head, and tried to relax. Now Mr. Morgan could shake the cotton out of his brains and go back to running the show. All the director had to do was stretch out the last orchestra number and wrap the station up for the night.

Afterwards there was going to be a certain amount of unpleasantness in the

station manager's office. Mr. Saunders would probably demote him to dolly pushing. But at least the show hadn't come unraveled the way it had the first time the megacycle moocher took over KTOZ.

The throbbing headache had subsided to a dull thudding by the time Marv finally followed Mr. Morgan into Mr. Saunders' office. The station manager looked up, giving them a gloomy glare of greeting. "A year ago I had a good job with WTVJ," he announced morosely. "WTVJ—that's in Miami."

"I was with KPIX myself," Mr. Morgan sighed. "I had a good job too."

Marv decided to keep quiet. A year ago he had been working for RadVac Electronics when RadVac and the National Bureau of Standards' Central TV Propagation Laboratory had made that abortive attempt at bouncing a beamed u.h.f. telecast off the moon.

He still got nightmares when he thought about that project. He had been working the transmitter station that night when the flash blow-up occurred. For ten seconds green balls of fire had exploded around him like popcorn. Then consciousness had departed and he had awakened a week later to find himself in a hospital with his skull fractured.

NBS, after that blow-up, had emphatically disassociated itself from the project, and Mr. J. C. Trease, the president of RadVac had personally fired him. "I don't know what happened, Marv," J. C. had said, "but it must have been your fault. It always is."

Things might have turned out to be pretty bleak if he hadn't been able to persuade Mr. Saunders to buy the singed equipment and promoted a job at KTOZ for himself at the same time. Marv's judgment told him this was something he had better not remind Mr. Saunders of.

"Yes, sir, I had a fine job with WTVJ," Mr. Saunders repeated firmly. "But I had to listen to the siren call of ambition. If there's one thing that will always give you trouble, it's listening to the siren call of ambition. So now I got ulcers and a schizophrenic TV station."

Marv began to look worried. He opened his mouth.

"Shut up, Marv," Mr. Saunders said. The order was given without rancor, almost mechanically.

Marv closed his mouth.

"It's schizophrenic, all right," Mr. Morgan nodded. "How else can you explain that baseball game last Tuesday night?" He braced his hands on the desk and lifted his voice. "It's the last of the ninth. Our Lions are losing 1 to 0. We got two outs and a man on first. The catcher comes up. He belts one over the left field fence for the tying and winning run—over KTOZ he does. Out at the park he bloops a short fly for an easy out."

Marv brightened. "For a while there those Lion fans watching the telecast were sure living, Mr Mor—"

"Shut up, Marv," Mr. Morgan said.

"And that confounded Mr. Yagi," Mr. Saunders groaned. "So far he's stuck to mooching Class-C time. But if he shifts to Class-A? What if he—" he shuddered—"starts mooching commercials?"

Mr. Morgan nudged Marv. "Speak up, Marv," he said. "Mr. Saunders is talking to you."

Marv sighed. "I—"

"Shut up, Marv," Mr. Saunders said. "What is going to happen then is I am personally going to hire three thugs to ram that contaminated moon stuff, from klystron oscillator to fire extinguisher, down your stupid throat."

There would undoubtedly have been much more along this same line, but Marv could hear D'Arcy starting to scream. His judgment informed him he had better hunt up a telegraph office and wire for help.

IN A large and expensive office, in a large and expensive building, J. C. Trease, president of RadVac Electronics, received the first of Marv's tele-

grams that next morning. Immediately thereafter he began screaming for Mike Carson, his face the color of a hot water bottle. J.C. had more communications equipment in his office than the U.S. Air Force, but when he wanted Mike he usually screamed.

The scream brought Mike Carson in at a brisk gallop. "Easy, J.C.," Mike panted. "Remember your heart, J.C."

"That stupid Marv," J.C. roared, waving the telegram under Mike's nose.

Mike sat down suddenly. "Oh no, J.C.," he said. "What's Marv up to now?"

"How should I know what that stupid character's up to?" J.C. bellowed. "Just go down there and make him stop."

"But, J.C.—"

"Listen," J.C. said, forcing his voice down to a grating screech, "there was a 'Satisfactory Performance' clause attached to that experimental stuff that stupid Marv sold Saunders. He can make us yank out every piece we put in that station. That stupid Marv will give us a black eye you can see all the way back to Dun & Bradstreet."

"But, J.C.—"

"Don't argue," J.C. wailed. "Move, boy, move!"

Marv's second telegram arrived in Dr. Wayne Milan's office in the Institute of Parapsychological Research just as the doctor was preparing to leave on a lecture tour. He read it hastily and handed it to his secretary, Miss Delessi Lane.

"What do you make of this, Delessi?" he asked.

His secretary, a tiny but beautifully landscaped girl with hair the color of an eight ball, and wicked green eyes that could make a pair of dice roll over and say "seven," shrugged. "Sounds like a publicity stunt to me, Doctor."

"You're probably right," Dr. Milan nodded. "Still, perhaps you'd better drive down and check."

"Me?" Delessi wailed. "But I was planning to spend the next few days at the beach. I was going to pick up a sun tan or something. Besides, I don't know how to check a TV station for ghosts."

"Just wander around and look mysterious. Toss off words such as psychokinesis and GESP test and ecchymosis. That ought to impress somebody."

Delessi's green eyes picked up a pixilated glow. "If you just want them impressed, I'll wear my curved, banned-in-Boston sweater. But I still say it's a publicity stunt."

THREE blocks east of the Institute of Parapsychological Research, in one of the regional offices of the Federal Communications Commission, a tall, gloomy young man named Jefferson Yates was staring at the third of Marv's telegrams and echoing Delessi's opinion. "It's just a lousy publicity stunt, Chief," Jefferson Yates was saying. "I know that Marv Delancey from way back, and I'd sooner trust a cobra. This is just a larcenous scheme to boost some show's audience rating."

"On the other hand," the harassed man behind the steel Army desk pointed out, "perhaps it isn't."

"You mean you think maybe this phantom could be somebody's diathermy machine transmitting his poor old grandpappy's dear departed shade?"

"I'm trying not to think about it at all," the harassed man behind the desk said. "That telegram is too confusing to make sense." He flipped a file card across the blotter. "You can get in touch with the local MARS organization at this address in case you want to set up mobile patrols. Now better get your lab rolling. You have a fast three-hour drive ahead of you."

"Yes, sir," Jefferson Yates said. "But if I find out that Marv Delancey has got a trick camera hooked up in that trick station, I'm gonna hoist him on a batwing and telecast cowboy pictures with his teeth."

Back in station KTOZ Marv reported for duty that day after lunching sparingly on three cups of black coffee and two aspirins. He stopped for a few minutes to watch a crew block out a

mystery show, and then ambled on toward Studio D to view the remains.

A tall, gloomy young man lifted his head and pasted him with a glare of brooding suspicion as he entered Studio D. "Hi, Jefferson Yates," Marv said. "I'm glad you—"

"Shut up, Marv," Jefferson Yates said.

Marv grinned weakly. Ducking under a mike boom, he headed for the control booth where he could see Mike Carson swearing at the console.

Mr. Saunders intercepted him as he started to circle the booth. The station manager was towing a lovely brunette who was landscaped to a degree of lushness rarely seen outside a burlesque theatre.

"Marv," Mr. Saunders said, "this is Miss Delessi Lane from the Institute of Parapsychological Research. She's interested in that confounded Mr. Yagi. Mind showing her around?"

"Well, no," Marv said. "But I'm supposed to work the console in the mobile unit at the race—"

"You still have an hour to spare," Mr. Saunders told him, glancing at his watch. "I got to keep my eye on an agent the FCC sicked on—hah! There he is now."

He turned and trotted off, leaving Marv staring at the brunette. Somewhere below cell level his mind seemed to be playing tricks on him, because this girl could have stepped out of one of Mr. Yagi's fantastic montages. She belonged in a palm tree mirage, and her name should have been Fatima.

"I'm Marv Delancey," Marv said, surfacing his mind with an effort. "Where would you like to start, Miss Lane?"

"Just any little old place, Marv," Delessi informed him warmly. "Do you have a dark room like photographers do?"

The emerald-eyed fugitive from the Arabian Nights, Marv discovered, had a devilish facility for sending a man into deep shock and then starting him babbling like a disk jockey. His head was going around in a fast, centrifuge spin when he climbed into the mobile unit an hour later. He tried hard to concentrate on the job at hand, but his heart was not in it. Not until the six furlong stake race did he really notice what was happening on the monitor.

The stake race was a wild, heart-stirring scramble. A long shot bay gelding named Sinbad III came up in a driving finish to nose out the odds on favorite, Major Eniac—over station KTOZ that's what the gelding did. On the track it was different. On the track Major Eniac was under the wire, pulled up and cooling off before Sinbad III turned for home.

On the way back to the studio Marv decided he better stop off for more aspirins. . . .

IT'S a magnificent, giddy, glittering world—that world of the magical picture tube. It's a push-button, electronic-beam Gadget Baghdad where the moon rises a thousand times a night and Scheherazade comes in assorted sizes and colors. But even fantasy has its limits, and ten thousand rabid racing fans were to draw the line wrathfully at that two-way finish.

That night the KTOZ switchboard was swamped with incoherent calls from wailing gamblers. Two hard-faced bookies called on Mr. Saunders. The city's horse parlors, which had been paying off on the telecasts, seemed to be slightly annoyed with KTOZ. The bookies left Mr. Saunders white and shaken.

And that night Mr. Yagi promoted himself to the webs. By an eerie sort of electronic osmosis he seeped into the Bell System microwave link and went Coast-to-Coast.

The news of Mr. Yagi's appearance on the networks came over the KTOZ wire services that next morning. The early items, Marv noticed, were written up with slightly raffish touch—closing copy gag stuff for the commentators. But as the phantom clown began to build up airtime, as the data on him

was collected and evaluated, the humor was replaced by alarm.

Attempts at photographing the little tramp clown disclosed the disquieting fact that the film was able to pick up nothing from the picture tube but a complex geometrical pattern. There were numerous reports of startling db gain in signal-to-noise ratio in fringe areas during the aberrant telecasts, and sporadic-E dx boomed. A sudden influx of amnesia patients jammed the hospital psycho wards.

In Houston, Delessi's boss, Dr. Milan, made a special TV appearance to discuss the bizarre Phantom of the Phosphors. Marv and Delessi caught the telecast in the KTOZ coffee shop. The doctor, Marv decided, was terrific.

"Mr. Yagi," Dr. Milan told his vast audience, "is undoubtedly the product of mass videopsia, or controlled visual hallucinations induced, perhaps, by some esoteric ray stimulation of the temporal lobes of the brain." He went on to cite the dream producing experiments made with Rahm electrodes on the hypersensitive sight areas of the brain. He hinted at sinister plots to control thought, and stated he was cancelling his lecture tour to take an active part in the investigation.

LATE that next evening Marv drove Delessi out to the airport to pick up the parapsychologist. They'd had a rough day at KTOZ, and Marv's nerves were fluttering like loose confetti. During a spot announcement Mr. Yagi had come dancing out of that eerie mist. He had flourished his educated hat, and a red-haired waitress passing in front of the receiver in the coffee shop had vanished for fifteen minutes, turning the place into a howling bedlam. A frantic order from police headquarters had cut KTOZ off the air, and Mr. Saunders had been screaming high soprano at Marv when he left with Delessi.

By the time they brought Dr. Milan back the station manager had mercifully quieted down. Now he was slumped behind his desk, glaring in moody frustration at Mike Carson and Jefferson Yates. Marv slipped into a chair and tried to make himself inconspicuous while the parapsychologist took over.

In person, Dr. Milan was even more impressive than he had been on the TV screen. He talked like a grounded angel. With practically no encouragement he swung into a brilliant discourse on warped casual sequences, interacting dimensional systems, ion vortices and chrono breakthroughs. Marv would have been willing to listen all night if Jefferson Yates hadn't cut in.

"Doc," the FCC agent said in a tired voice, "after what happened to that redhead I am willing to admit there is something unearthly about the megacycle moocher. The question is what do we do about it?"

Mr. Saunders sat up, shaking himself out of a deep daze. "I know what we do about it," he yelled. "We call up RadVac and make them yank that contaminated moon equipment which that stupid Marv conned me into buying."

Dr. Milan looked startled. "Moon equipment?" he repeated. He stared curiously at Marv.

Marv could feel trouble coming. He said, "I—"

"Shut up, Marv," Mike Carson growled. "Dr. Milan wants a coherent, factual, unbiased account of the project. I'll—"

"Unbiased—hah!" Mr. Saunders roared. "You and that stupid Marv were accessories before the fact. If Dr. Milan wants an unbiased account of that larcenous, idiotic experiment, I'll give it to him."

"Incredible!" Dr. Milan murmured when Mr. Saunders finally finished. He began to pace the floor, speaking in staccato bursts. "Those green balls of fire... probably some invidious contraterrene life form picked up from some strange corner of space into which the system is now entering . . . fossil electronic intelligence, lying dormant for millenia

and captured by that microwave beam . . . should have isolated this station immediately . . . prevented contamination from spreading. . . ."

"Now wait a minute, Dr. Milan," Mike Carson protested. "You can't blame RadVac for—"

"If the electronic equipment used in the moon experiment is readily accessible," Dr. Milan interrupted incisively, "I should like to examine it at once."

Station KTOZ had that empty look about it—that dying of tempo, fading of lights look that comes to Gadget Baghdad when all the mechanical genii, all the glass-and-metal djinn are frozen in the stasis of in-between-shows. Marv, as he followed the small group from the brightly lighted office, was conscious of a creeping chill of apprehension.

After that the night became a wary prowl through shadowy studios, a series of uneasy questions and uneasy answers. It became a rococo zoo where cable boa constrictors slithered and weird creatures with glowing dials for eyes glared out of the darkness.

AT LAST they were in the Studio D control booth and Delessi was crowding up against Marv. "Dr. Milan," he said, "Delessi is scared. Maybe we'd better wait until—"

"Shut up, Marv," Delessi said.

Marv sighed. He let his attention slide off the rim of his mind and plunge deep into the dark funnel of consciousness where the shape of the Unknown is still a challenge.

The strange voice had a wild, eldritch quality about it. It appeared to be coming from far away, like the distant yapping of a coursing jackal. At first Marv thought his imagination must be picking up video-carrier buzz. But when he tried to shield out the sound, it came in loud and clear.

He hadn't noticed the small man in the baggy black suit enter the control booth, but suddenly there he was. He stood swaying in the half light from the monitor which Mr. Saunders must have turned on. He was glaring around with all the fire and fury of an evangelist bearing down on Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Come out, Shadow!" he was yapping in that eerie, eldritch voice. "You who were nourished in the Sacred Waninga of the Spider Totem—in the Magic Tribal Bundle of the Pawnee and the stone Tjurunga of the Congo! You who were the Dark Hunter of the Oppensnellen! The dread priest of the Nailed Skull! Come out, Shadow!"

Delessi let out a startled yelp. "Mr. Yagi!" she wailed. Her green eyes flared in the glow from the monitor.

The little man spun toward her, and Marv caught the dull glint of a German Luger swinging in an erratic arc. "She of the basket and sistrum!" the little man squalled. "She who walked the streets of Bubastis in the ancient days when Horus, master of the flame-spitting snake ruled the mighty hierarchy of gods!"

"Easy, pal, easy," Marv murmured. The guy was probably some poor devil of a loony anthropologist who had been hearing too much about the Phantom of the Phospors and had slipped into the studio to flush him out. But the Luger was dangerously, deadly real.

At the sound of his voice it wavered toward him. Marv had a microsecond flash, strobe light sharp, of the muzzle steadying on his forehead as he dove for the gibbering little man. Then the booth seemed to explode in a blinding, green-laced flare.

He came up out of the memory of that flare-laced blackness to find himself in an aseptic white bed in a swaying, metal-sheathed cubicle. He appeared to be playing to quite an audience. A tall, gray-haired man with a tired, lined face was staring down at him. Delessi was standing at the tall man's elbow. Beyond them he could see Dr. Milan and Jefferson Yates and a uniformed nurse.

"Hello, Dr. Cary," Marv said weakly. "Looks like I'm back in the hospital again."

"Well, not exactly, Marv," the doctor

said. "You're on a yacht, appropriately named the Flying Dutchman, anchored off the Coast of Lower California."

"And you've been unconscious for over three weeks, and a million things have been happening," Delessi said excitedly.

Dr. Cary nodded. "Depressed skull fracture. Bone case broached at the same spot as the previous—"

"And if that wacky professor had been a better shot, Marv," Delessi cut in, "you'd be a dead hero instead of the world's only living videopath."

Marv tried desperately to get a focus on Delessi. He seemed to be experiencing a sharp horizontal sync drift.

"Videopath means," Delessi briefed him winsomely, "that you're something like a telepath, only you need carrier waves and receivers to do your stuff."

DR. MILAN edged his way up to the bed. "Down through the ages, Marv," he said, "a great many people have tried to create a brave new dream world; but you and that incredible, 20th-century genie, Mr. Yagi, almost succeeded in changing the spatial character of physical reality."

"That cute little clown turned out to be a Mickey Djin, Marv," Delessi chimed in. "Another week and we'd all have been seeing pink rocs and magic carpets."

"Before we got you into this shielded cabin, Marv," Jefferson Yates said bleakly, contemplating Marv with glum displeasure, "you closed down every TV station in the country. Some of the montages you dreamed up while you were unconscious were enough to make burlesque obsolete. If Dr. Milan hadn't hit on the correct—"

"It was really nothing," Dr. Milan stated modestly. "After I learned from Dr. Cary about the splinter of trick metal left in your brain by the moon project explosion, and the strange wave patterns electroencephalographic tests subsequently revealed, why the answer practically put itself together. Of course we still have a great deal of research ahead of us before we can establish a scientific explanation for videopathy."

"In the meantime," Dr. Cary interjected soothingly, "the TV industry has placed this yacht at your disposal. They have agreed to underwrite all expenses of your—ah, extended tour."

"Isn't it just marvelous, Marv?" Delessi cooed. "Like the original Flying Dutchman you are doomed to sail the Seven Seas for ever and ever."

"But you gotta promise never to go near a TV transmitter," Yates said.

"And whenever the Flying Dutchman puts into port, it will be necessary for you to confine yourself to this cabin," Dr Milan said.

"And you gotta—"

"And, Marv—"

Too many excited people were trying to tell him too much. He could hear the words but he couldn't follow the script. He propped himself up on one shaky elbow. *"Shut up!"* he roared. *"Everybody shut up!"*

Sudden shocked silence flowed around him like a fresh balm of Gilead lube job. He leaned back, a beatific grin spreading across his face. It felt wonderful to be on the transmitting side of that order for a change.

"All right, I'll agree to everything," he said serenely. He glanced around him, hesitated and made a quick mental addition. "That is, if Delessi will—"

Delessi crowded against the bed. "You twisted my arm, Marv," she informed him affably. "Somebody radio for a minister quick." She reached out and patted the Aladdin's lump tenderly. Then she bent down. "Better brace yourself, Marv," she said. "I am about to toss some curved lipstick your way."

Deep in that splinter of trick metal embedded in Marv's brain—deep in that strange, ultramicroscopic world that lies in that fantastic dimensional strip between 10 and 100 angstrom units a glowing Think Dot spun in an orbit. "That stupid Marv," the Think Dot thought helplessly. "That stupid, double-crossing, chowderheaded, stupid Marv."

HYPERPILOSITY

Many a gorgeous babe yearns for a sleek fur

coat—but not when it's part of herself. . . .

By L. SPRAGUE De CAMP

WE ALL KNOW about the brilliant successes in the arts and sciences, but, if you knew all their stories, you might find that some of the failures were really interesting."

It was Pat Weiss speaking. The beer had given out, and Carl Vandercook had gone out to get some more. Pat, having cornered all the chips in sight, was leaning back and emitting vast clouds of smoke.

"That means," I said, "that you've got a story coming. Okay, spill it. The poker can wait for a little while."

"Only don't stop in the middle and say 'That reminds me,' and go off on another story, and from the middle of that to another, and so on," put in Hannibal Snyder.

Pat cocked an eye at Hannibal. "Listen, mug, I haven't digressed once in the last three stories I've told. If you can tell a story better, go to it. Ever hear of J. Roman Oliveira?" he said, not waiting, I noticed, to give Hannibal a chance to take him up. He continued.

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Carl's been talking a lot about that new gadget of his, and no doubt it will make him famous if he ever finishes it. And Carl usually finishes what he sets out to do. My friend Oliveira finished what he set out to do, also, and it should have made him famous, but it didn't. Scientifically his work was a success, and deserving of the highest praise, but humanly it was a failure. That's why he's now running a little college down in Texas. He still does good work, and gets articles in the journals, but it's not what he had ever reason to suspect that he deserved. Just got a letter from him the other day—it seems he's now a proud grandfather. That reminds me of my grandfather—

"Hey!" roared Hannibal. Pat said "Huh? Oh, I see. Sorry. I won't do it again." He went on:

I first knew J. Roman when I was a mere student at the Medical Center and he was a professor of virology. The J in his name stands for Haysoos, spelled J-e-s-u-s, which is a perfectly good Mexican name. But he'd been so much kidded about it in the States that he preferred to go by "Roman."

You remember that the Great Change, which is what this story has to do with, started in the winter of 1971, with that awful flu epidemic. Oliveira came down with it. I went around to see him to get an assignment, and found him perched on a pile of pillows and wearing the god-awfullest pink and green pajamas. His wife was reading to him in Spanish.

"Leesten, Pat," he said when I came in, "I know you're a worthy student, but I weesh you and the whole damn virology class were roasting on the hottest greedle in Hell. Tell me what you want, and then go away and let me die in peace."

I got my information, and was just going when his doctor came in—old Fogarty, who used to lecture on sinuses. He'd given up general practice long before, but he was so scared of losing a good virologist that he was handling Oliveira's case himself.

"Stick around, sonny," he said to me when I started to follow Mrs. Oliveira out, "and learn a little practical medicine. I've always thought it a mistake that we haven't a class to train doctors in bedside manners. Now observe how I do it. I smile at Oliveira here, but I don't act so damned cheerful that he'd find death a welcome relief from my company. That's a mistake some young doctors make. Notice that I walk up briskly, and not as if I were afraid my patient was liable to fall in pieces at the slightest jar. . ." And so on.

THE FUN came when he put the end of this stethoscope on Oliveira's chest.

"Can't hear a damned thing," he snorted. "Or rather, you've got so much hair that all I can hear is the ends of it scraping on the diaphragm. May have to shave it. But say, isn't that rather unusual for a Mexican?"

"You're jolly well right she ees," retorted the sufferer. "Like most natives of my beautiful Mejico, I am of mostly Eendian descent. Eendians are of Mongoloid race, and so have little body hair. It's all come out in the last week."

"That's funny," Fogarty said.

I spoke up. "Say, Dr. Fogarty, it's more than that. I had my flu a month ago, and the same thing's been happening to me. I've always felt like a sissy because of not having any hair on my torso to speak of, and now I've got a crop that's almost long enough to braid. I didn't think anything special about it. . ."

I don't remember what was said next, because we all talked at once. But when we got calmed down there didn't seem to be anything we could do without some systematic investigation, and I promised Fogarty to come around to his place so he could look me over.

I did, the next day, but he didn't find anything except a lot of hair. He took samples of everything he could think of, of course. I'd given up wearing underwear because it itched, and anyway the hair was warm enough to make it un-

necessary, even in a New York January.

The next thing I heard was a week later, when Oliveira returned to his classes, and told me that Fogarty had caught the flu. Oliveira had been making observations on the old boy's thorax, and found that he, too, had begun to grow body hair at an unprecedented rate, in quantity and speed.

Then my girl friend—not the present missus; I hadn't met her yet—overcame her embarrassment enough to ask me whether I could explain how it was that she was getting hairy. I could see that the poor girl was pretty badly cut up about it, because obviously her chances of catching a good man would be reduced by her growing a pelt like a bear or a gorilla. I wasn't able to enlighten her, but told her that, if it was any comfort, a lot of other people were suffering from the same thing.

Then we heard that Fogarty had died. He was a good egg and we were sorry, but he'd led a pretty full life, and you couldn't say that he was cut off in his prime.

Oliveira called me to his office. "Pat," he said, "you were looking for a chob last fall, ees it not? Well, I need an asseestant. We're going to find out about this hair beesiness. Are you on?" I was, and told him so.

We started by examining all the clinical cases. Everybody who had, or had had, the flu was growing hair. Also, it was a severe winter, and it looked as though everybody was going to have the flu sooner or later.

Just about that time I had a bright idea. I looked up all the cosmetic companies that made depilatories, and soaked what little money I had into their stock. I was sorry later, but I'll come to that.

Roman Oliveira was a glutton for work, and with the hours he made me keep I began to have uneasy visions of flunking out. But the fact that my girl friend had become so self-conscious about her hair that she wouldn't go out any more saved me some time.

WE WORKED and worked over our guinea-pigs and rats, but didn't get anywhere. Oliveira got a bunch of hairless Chihuahua dogs and tried assorted gunks on them, but nothing happened. He even got a pair of East African sand rats—Heterocephalus—hideous looking things—but that was a blank, too.

Then the business got into the papers. I noticed a little article in *The New York Times*, on an inside page. A week later there was a full-column story on page one of the second part. Then it was on the front page. It was mostly only general statements about different doctors' opinions of the cause of the nationwide hyperpilosity.

Our usual February dance had to be called off because almost none of the students could get their girls to go. Attendance at the movie houses had fallen off pretty badly for much the same reason. It was a cinch to get a good seat, even if you arrived around 8:00 p.m. I noticed one funny little item in the paper, to the effect that the filming of "Tarzan and the Octopus-Men" had been called off because the actors were supposed to go running around in G-strings, and the company found they had to clip and shave the whole cast all over every few days if they didn't want their fur to show.

It was fun to ride on a bus and watch the people, who were pretty well bundled up. Most of them scratched, and those who were too well-bred to scratch just squirmed and looked unhappy.

Next I read that applications for marriage licenses had fallen off so that three clerks were able to handle the entire business for Greater New York, including Yonkers, which had just been incorporated into the Bronx.

I was gratified to see that my cosmetic stocks were going up nicely. I tried to get my room-mate, Bert Kafket, to get in on them too. But he just smiled mysteriously, and said he had other plans. Bert was a kind of professional pessimist.

"Pat," he said, "Maybe you and Oli-

veira will lick this business, and maybe not. I'm betting that you won't. If I win, the stocks that I've bought will be doing famously long after your depilatories are forgotten."

As you know, people were pretty excited about the plague. But when the weather began to get warm the fun really started. First the four big underwear companies ceased operations, one after another. Two of them were placed in receivership, another liquidated completely, and the fourth was able to pull through by switching to the manufacture of tablecloths and American flags. The bottom dropped entirely out of the cotton market, as this alleged hair-growing flu had spread all over the world by now. Congress had been planning to go home early, and was, as usual, being urged to do so by the conservative newspapers. But now Washington was jammed with cotton planters demanding that the Government do something, and they didn't dare. The Government was willing enough to do something, but unfortunately didn't have the foggiest idea of what to do.

All this time Oliveira, more or less assisted by me, was working night and day on the problem, but we didn't seem to have any better luck than the Government.

You couldn't hear anything on the radio in the building where I lived, because of the interference from the powerful electric clippers that everybody had installed and kept going all the time.

It's an ill wind, as the prophet saith, and Bert Kafket got some good out of it. His girl, whom he had been pursuing for some years, had been making a good salary as a model at Josephine Lyon's exclusive dress establishment on Fifth Avenue, and she had been leading Bert a merry dance. But now all of a sudden the Lyon place folded up, as nobody seemed to be buying any clothes, and the girl was only too glad to take Bert as her lawful wedded husband. Not much hair was grown on the women's faces, fortunately for them, or God knows what would have become of the race. Bert and I flipped a coin to see which of us should move, and I won.

Congress finally passed a bill setting up a reward of a million dollars for whoever should find a permanent cure for hyperpilosity, and then adjourned, having, as usual, left a flock of important bills not acted upon.

WHEN the weather became really hot in June, all the men quit wearing shirts, as their pelts covered them quite as effectively. The police force kicked so much about having to wear their regular uniforms that they were allowed to go around in dark blue polo shirts and shorts. But pretty soon they were rolling up their shirts and sticking them in the pockets of their shorts. It wasn't long before the rest of the male population of the United States was doing likewise. In growing hair the human race hadn't lost any of its capacity to sweat, and you'd pass out with the heat if you tried to walk anywhere on a hot day with any amount of clothes on. I can still remember holding on to a hydrant at Third Avenue and 60th Street and trying not to faint, with the sweat pouring out the ankles of my pants and the buildings going round and round. After that I was sensible and stripped down to shorts like everyone else.

In July, Natasha, the gorilla in the Bronx Zoo, escaped from her cage and wandered around the park for hours before anyone noticed her. The zoo visitors all thought she was merely an unusually ugly member of their own species.

If the hair played hob with the textile and clothing businesses generally, the market for silk simply disappeared. Stockings were just quaint things that our ancestors had worn, like cocked hats and periwigs.

Neither Oliveira nor I took any vacation that summer, as we were working like fury on the hair problem. Roman promised me a cut of the reward when and if he won it.

But we didn't get anywhere at all dur-

ing the summer. When classes started we had to slow down a bit on the research, as I was in my last year, and Oliveira had to teach. But we kept at it as best we could.

It was funny to read the editorials in the papers. The *Chicago Tribune* even suspected a Red plot. You can imagine the time that the cartoonists for the *New Yorker* and *Esquire* had.

With the drop in the price of cotton, the South was really flat on its back this time. I remember when the Harwick bill was introduced in Congress, to require every citizen over the age of five to be clipped at least once a week. A bunch of Southerners were back of it, of course. When that was defeated, largely on the argument of unconstitutionality, they put forward one requiring every person to be clipped before he'd be allowed to cross a state line. The theory was that human hair is a commodity—which it is, sometimes—and that crossing a state line with a coat of the stuff, whether your own or someone else's, constituted interstate commerce, and brought you under control of the Federal government. It looked for a while as though it would pass, but the Southerners finally accepted a substitute bill requiring all Federal employees, and cadets at the military and naval academies, to be clipped.

About this time—in the autumn of 1971—the cotton and textile interests got out a big advertising campaign to promote clipping. They had slogans, such as "Don't be a Hairy Ape!" and pictures of a couple of male swimmers, one with hair and the other without, and a pretty girl turning in disgust from the hirsute swimmer and fairly pouncing on the clipped one.

I don't know how much good their campaign would have done, but they overplayed their hand. They, and all the clothing outfits, tried to insist on boiled shirts, not only for evening wear, but for daytime as well. I never thought a long-suffering people would really revolt against the tyrant Style, but we did. The thing that really tore it was the inauguration of President Passavant. There was an unusually warm January thaw that year, and the President, the V.P. and all the Justices of the Supreme Court appeared without a stitch on above the waist and damn little below.

We became a nation of confirmed near-nudists, just as did everybody else sooner or later. The one drawback to real nudism was the fact that, unlike the marsupials, man hasn't any natural pockets. So we compromised between the hair, the need for something to hold fountain pens, money, and so forth and our traditional ideas of modesty by adopting an up-to-date version of the Scottish sporran.

The winter was a bad one for flu, and everybody who hadn't caught it the preceding winter got it now, so soon a hairless person became such a rarity that one wondered if the poor fellow had the mange.

IN MAY of 1972 we finally began to get somewhere. Oliveira had the bright idea—which both of us ought to have thought of sooner—of examining ectogenic babies. Up to now nobody had noticed that they began to develop hair a little later than babies born the normal way. You remember that human ectogenesis was just beginning to be worked about then; test-tube babies aren't yet practical for large-scale production by a long shot, but we'll get there some day.

Well, Oliveira found that if the ectogens were subjected to a really rigid quarantine, they never developed hair at all, at least not in more than the normal quantities. By really rigid quarantine, I mean that the air they breathed was heated to 800 degrees C, and then liquefied, and run through a battery of cyclones, and washed with a dozen disinfectants. Their food was treated in a comparable manner. I don't quite see how the poor little fellows survived such unholy sanitation, but they did. And they didn't grow hair—until they were brought in contact with other human beings, or were injected with sera from the

blood of hairy babies, normally born.

Oliveira figured out that the cause of the hyperpilosity was what he'd suspected all along: another of these damned self-perpetuating protein molecules. As you know, you can't see a protein molecule, and you can't do much with it chemically because, if you do, it forthwith ceases to be a protein molecule. We have their structure worked out pretty well now, but it's been a slow process, with lots of inferences from inadequate data; sometimes the inferences were right and sometimes they weren't.

But to do much in the way of detailed analysis of the things, you need a respectable quantity of them, and these that we were after didn't exist in even a disrespectable amount. Then Oliveira worked out his method of counting them. The reputation he made from that method is about the only permanent thing he got out of all this work.

When we applied the method we found something decidedly screwy—an ectogen's virus count after catching hyperpil was the same as it had been before. That didn't seem right; we knew that he had been injected with hyperpil molecules, and had come out with a fine mattress as a result.

Then one morning I found Oliveira at his desk looking like a medieval monk who had just seen a vision after a forty-days' fast. He said, "Pat, don't buy a yacht with your share of that meelion. They cost too much to upkeep."

"Huh?" was the brightest remark I could think of.

"Look here," he said, going up to the blackboard. It was covered with chalk diagrams of protein molecules. "We have three proteins, alpha, beta, and gamma. No alphas have exeested for thousands of years. Now you will note that the only deeference between the alpha and the beta is that these nitrogens—" he pointed—"are hooked onto thees chain instead of that one. You will also observe, from the energy relations wreeten down here, that if one beta is eentroduced eento a set of alphas, all the alphas will presently turn into betas.

"Now, we know now that all sorts of protein molecules are being assembled inside us all the time; most of them are unstable and break up again, or are inert and harmless, or lack the power of self-reproduction—anyway, nothing happens because of them. But, because they are so beeg and complicated, the possible forms they take are very many, and it is possible that once in a long time some new kind of protein appears with self-producing qualities; in other words, a virus. Probably that's how the various disease viruses got started, all because something choggled an ordinary protein molecule that was chust beeing feenished and got the nitrogens hooked on the wrong chains.

"My idea is thees: the alpha protein, which I have reconstructed from what we know about its descendants beta and gamma, one exeested as a harmless and inert protein molecule in the human body. Then one day somebody heecupped as one of them was being formed, and presto! we have a beta. But the beta is not harmless; it reproduces itself fast, and it inheebits thee growth of hair on most of our bodies. So presently all our species, wheech at the time was pretty apish, catch this virus, and lose their hair. Moreover, it is one of the viruses that is transmeeted to the embryo, so the new babies don't have hair, either.

"Well, our ancestors sheever a while, and then learn to cover themselves with animal skeens to keep warm, and also to keep fire. And so, the march of ceevilizations it is commence. Chust theenk—except for that one original beta protein molecule, we should probably today all be merely a kind of goreela or cheempanzee—anyway, an ordinary anthropoid ape.

"Now, I feegure that what has happened is that another change in the form of the molecule has taken place, changing it from beta to gamma—and gamma is a harmless and inert leetle fellow, like alpha. So we are back where we started.

"Our problem, yours and mine, is to find how to turn the gammas with

wheech we are all swarming back into betas. In other words, now that we have become all of a sudden cured of the disease that was endemic in the whole race for thousands of years, we want our disease back again. And I theenk I see how it can be done."

I COULDN'T get much more out of him; he went to work harder than ever. After several weeks he announced that he was ready to experiment on himself; his method consisted of a combination of a number of drugs—one of them was the standard cure for glanders in horses, as I recall—and a high-frequency electromagnetic fever.

I wasn't very keen about it, because I'd gotten to like the fellow, and that awful dose he was going to give himself looked enough to kill a regiment. But he went right ahead.

Well, it nearly did kill him. But after three days he was more or less back to normal, and was whooping at the discovery that the hair on his limbs and body was rapidly falling out. In a couple of weeks he had no more hair than you'd expect a Mexican professor of virology to have.

But then our real surprise came, and it wasn't a pleasant one!

We expected to be more or less swamped by publicity, and had made our preparations accordingly. I remember staring into Oliveira's face for a full minute and then reassuring him that he had trimmed his mustache to exact symmetry, and getting him to straighten my new necktie.

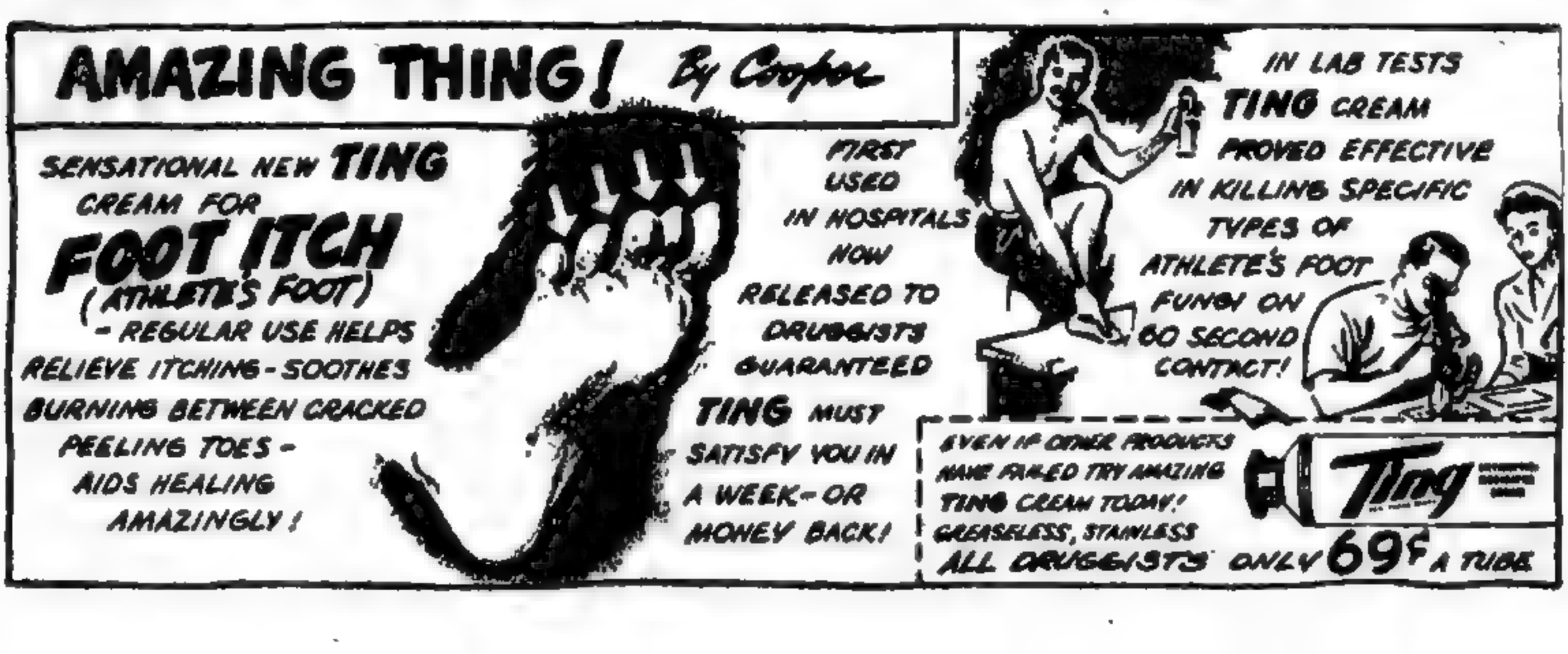
Our epoch-making announcement dug up two personal calls from bored reporters, a couple of phone interviews from science editors, and not one photographer. We did make the science section of *The New York Times*, but with only about twelve lines of type. The paper merely stated that Professor Oliveira and his assistant—not named—had found the cause and cure of hyperpilosity; not a word about the possible effects of the discovery.

Our contracts with the Medical Center prohibited us from exploiting our discovery commercially, but we expected that plenty of other people would be quick to do so as soon as the method was made public. However, that didn't happen. In fact, we might have discovered a correlation between temperature and the pitch of the bullfrog's croak for all the splash we made.

A week later Oliveira and I talked to the department head, Wheelock, about the discovery. Oliveira wanted him to use his influence to get a dehairing clinic set up. But Wheelock couldn't see it.

"We've had a couple of inquiries," he admitted, "but nothing to get excited about. Remember the rush there was when Zimmerman's cancer treatment came out? Well, there's been nothing like that. In fact, I—ah—doubt whether I personally should care to undergo your treatment, surefire though it may be,

[*Turn page*]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Doctor Oliveira. I'm not in the least disparaging the remarkable piece of work you've done. But—ah—" here he ran his fingers through the hair on his chest, which was over six inches long, thick, and a beautiful silky white—"you know, I've gotten rather fond of the old pelt, and I'd feel slightly indecent back in my bare skin. Also, it's a lot more economical than a suit of clothes. And, if I may say so with due modesty, I don't think it's bad-looking. My family has always ridden me about my sloppy clothes, but now the laugh's on them; not one of them can show a coat of fur like mine!"

Oliveira and I left, sagging in the breeches a bit. We inquired of people we knew, and wrote letters to a number of them, asking what they thought of the idea of undergoing the Oliveira treatment. A few said they might if enough others did, but most of them responded in much the same vein that Doc Wheelock had; they'd gotten used to their hair, and saw no good reason for going back to their former glabrous state.

"So, Pat," said Oliveira to me, "it looks as though we don't get much fame out of our discovery. But we may steel salvage a leetle fortune. You remember that meelion-dollar reward? I sent in my application as soon as I recovered from my treatment. and we should hear from the Government any day."

We did. I was up at his apartment, and we were talking about nothing in particular, when Mrs. O. rushed in with the letter, squeaking, "Abre la! Open eet, Roman!"

He opened it without hurry, spread the sheet of paper out, and read it. Then he frowned and read it again. Then he laid it down, very carefully took out and lit the wrong end of a cork-tipped cigarette, and said in his levellest voice, "I have been stupid again, Pat. I never thought that there might be a time-leem-it on that reward offer. Now it seems that some crafty sanamabiche in Congress put one een, so that the offer expired on May first. You remember, I mailed the claim on the nineteenth, and they got it on the twenty-first, three weeks too late!"

I looked at Oliveira, and he looked at me and then at his wife, and she looked at him and then went without a word to the cabinet and got out two large bottles of tequila and three tumblers.

Oliveira pulled up three chairs around a little table, and settled with a sigh in one of them. "Pat," he said, "I may not have a meelion dollars, but I have something better—a woman who knows what is needed at a time like thees!"

And that's the inside story of the Great Change, or at least of one aspect thereof. That's how it happens that, when we today speak of a platinum-blonde movie star, we aren't referring to her scalp-hair alone, but the beautiful silvery pelt that covers her from crown to ankle.

There was just one more incident. Bert Kafket had me up to his place to dinner a few nights later. After I had told him and his wife about Oliveira's and my troubles, he asked how I had made out on that depilatory stock I'd bought. "I notice those stocks are back about where they started from before the Change," he added.

"Didn't make anything to speak of," I told him. "About the time they started to slide down from their peak, I was too busy working for Roman to pay much attention to them. When I fianlly did look them up I was just able to unload with a few cents' profit per share. How did you do on those stocks you were so mysterious about last year?"

"Maybe you noticed my new car as you came in?" grinned Bert. "That's them. Or rather, it; there was only one —Jones and Galloway Company."

"What do Jones and Galloway make? I never heard of them."

"They make—" here Bert's grin looked as if it were going to run around his head and meet behind—"curry-combs!"

And that was that. Here's Carl with the beer now. It's your deal, isn't it, Hannibal?

When the planetoid struck, the world would end. . . .

DOOMSTRUCK

By CLYDE B. SMITH

The end of the world

was coming . . . just

when George was really

beginning to live!

WHEN the approaching end of the world was announced nobody believed the news. This disbelief was due more to the obscure position of the discoverer than to a desire on the part of the human race to escape from the consequences of belief by hiding their heads, ostrichlike, in the sands of scepticism.

The first true prophet of annihilation was

a plodding graduate student in the department of astronomy in the Green Mountain Agricultural College. He was engaged in the task of mapping the heavens with the thirty-six inch reflector that was the backbone of the observatory. He was searching desperately for something new in the way of a comet, or an asteroid, or anything else that would furnish him with material for his doctoral dissertation.

In the course of this work he found what was first known as *Mortimer's Object*, named after its discoverer, Percy Mortimer. Having discovered the object, he spent a number of nights photographing the same area of the sky in order to assemble the raw material for the various calculations that would form the body of his dissertation. He reduced the pictures to a set of data obtained from the various measuring and calculating machines that are standard equipment in even a very small observatory.

The results of Mortimer's initial calculations were astonishing, and to him, perversely gratifying. Even though he and the rest of the world were doomed he would at least have the satisfaction of seeing his results published in every newspaper in the country, instead of seeing them buried away in a virtually unread astronomical journal.

He had found that his "object" was a runaway planetoid that was approaching the solar system from interstellar space. Due to an arrangement of the several bodies in the solar system that could occur only once every two hundred and forty-nine and one quarter years, a series of events was going to take place. The results of these events were so wildly improbable as to take on the appearance of a great cosmic joke. Each and every one of the planets more distant from the sun that the earth was going to have just the right effect on the planetoid to make it eventually deflect the moon from its orbit and hurl it squarely at Salome, Arizona.

Unfortunately, the news service to which Mortimer sent his dramatic announcement was in the habit of double checking all stories received, no matter how silly they sounded. A less cautious service would have printed the story as a joke and Mortimer would have been given credit in the end. But this was not the case, and the story, along with Mortimer's photographs and calculations, was sent to Dr. Weltsandsky of the Palomar Observatory. Several weeks later all of the papers that subscribed to the wire service in question carried banner headlines:

END OF THE WORLD PREDICTED
BY WELTSANDSKY

The second paragraph announced that the object had been discovered by an astronomy student named Percy Morrison. The following day Percy Mortimer shot himself, which hastened his demise by one year and two days and cheated Mortimer's object of one of its victims.

The citizens of the world reacted to the news in various ways. Vast hordes of people who had been atheists were suddenly converted and flocked in overflow crowds to churches, temples, mosques, pagodas and the like. On the other hand, great masses of people who had been firm believers were shaken in their faith by a suspicion that the Almighty was playing a dirty trick on them. Overflow crowds of these people flocked to bars, opium dens, burlesque shows, brothels and the like.

George Kootz got drunk for the first time in his life. His lifelong abstinence from liquor, indeed the whole ordering of his drab existence, had been motivated by feelings no more lofty than fear of social disapproval. George's earliest memory was of his mother's voice saying, "George, stop that. What will people think?" And so George had gone through life with the vague, uncomfortable feeling that *they* were watching him and thinking unnamed, unpleasant thoughts about him and that he had to take extra care.

WHEN the end of the world was forecast by a reliable authority George had his first feeling of being at one with the rest of mankind. The idea of sharing a common fate with *them* was a comforting thought and one that enabled him to walk into a bar with only a minimum of backward glances to see if *they* were watching.

So George Kootz sat at the bar making up for lost time by sampling all the various kinds of drinks he had never tried before. The air in the room was warm and a little stuffy. By the time he had finished his first drink, a manhattan, and begun his second, a pousse-café, he was relaxed enough to loosen the dull grey tie that hung about his stringy neck. As he drank his third, a glass of port wine, George ran his hand through his thin, sandy hair and left it mussed for the first time in his life. After a bottle of ale his pale blue eyes were beginning to wander in and out of focus. In the middle of his gin sling he unbuttoned the top buttons of his shirt, exposing his scrawny chest, and began to think about his past life.

At first his thoughts were mostly memories, memories that without the partial anesthesia of alcohol were too painful to admit to consciousness. He thought of the time his fifth grade teacher, Miss Coldflesh, had caught him in the basement of the school building playing—but even now the same wave of excruciating embarrassment he had felt at the time swept over him and he buried the memory as deeply as he could and went on to another. There was the time at the high school dance when the belle of the ball had, probably out of kindness for a suffering human being, allowed him one dance. He had stepped on the hem of her long lovely dress. She had screamed and everybody had looked at them. Looked at him.

There were many incidents of a similar nature, more than he liked to think about. He wept quietly into his pink lady and wondered why malign fate permitted him so often to do things that made people look at him and think harsh thoughts.

Suddenly, like a cool breeze blowing fresh life into his fevered, suffering mind, he realized that he and the rest of the world were all going to die when the moon hit Salome. Like a great burst of white flame in his brain he saw clearly that it would no longer matter what people thought about him. He called the bartender so that he could order another of the drinks he had read about and never tasted.

"Bring me," he said, slurring the words a little, "a Mickey Finn."

The bartender threw him out.

When George hit the street a wave of burning, tearing rage swept over him. Into it was packed all the repressed resentment, anger, and fury that he had been hiding from himself and the rest of the world all of his life. At the same instant he discovered his one great talent, the talent that had been buried along with every form of expression the normal human being is capable of. Using the power that had been latent in his mind, he picked up the bartender and hurled him through the plate glass window of the bar. Then, by a sort of reflex action, he looked around guiltily to see if anyone had been watching.

IT SUDDENLY struck him that he had been ten feet away from the bartender when he had picked him up. That he had done it by—what was the term he had read in that science fiction magazine—teleportation. He staggered over to the gutter and was sick.

Two days later Mr. Lord, an unctuous, epicene jewelry salesman in the excessively elegant establishment of J. M. Harter, was disturbed to notice a shabby, unpleasant little man loitering in a doorway across the street from the store. The little man's manner was furtive, he seemed to be striving to make himself as inconspicuous as possible, yet his attention was obviously focused on Harter's jewelry store. Mr. Lord was trying to earn a handsome commission

by making a sale to Chi-Chi Chandor and the elderly gentleman with her, who was known to Chi-Chi as Daddy Snookums and to Mr. Lord as Manfred W. Metterklump, the country's foremost manufacturer of inflatable brassières. It was clear to Mr. Lord that the little man's attention was centered either on Chi-Chi, which would annoy Mr. Metterklump, or on the task of "casing the joint," which would displease Mr. Harter. Either way he was a threat to Mr. Lord's security. Mr. Lord's attention was distracted from the task at hand.

"Come, come young man," snapped Mr. Metterklump in the midst of Mr. Lord's reverie, "Miss Chandor wants to look at that bracelet. Are you going to show it to her or aren't you?"

Mr. Lord gasped and squeaked, "Certainly Mr. Metterklump. I'm sorry, I—ah, oh dear, I'm so sorry."

He reached into the showcase and took out thirty-five thousand dollars worth of diamond bracelet. Chi-Chi stretched out her shapely wrist and Mr. Lord draped the bracelet across it. He intended to grasp the ends and fasten the clasp, but to his utter amazement the bracelet, apparently of its own volition, flew off Chi-Chi's wrist and went whizzing through the door. Chi-Chi, Mr. Lord and Mr. Metterklump stood dumbfounded and stared. Outside, in the doorway across the street, George Kootz looked around to see if anyone were watching him, then walked off with the bracelet in his pocket.

Mr. Lord was on the verge of tears. "Oh dear," he sniveled, "The world is going to be destroyed in only eight months and now things start disappearing. It isn't fair."

"I don't believe it," said Chi-Chi.

"If the right people were running the country these things wouldn't happen," said Mr. Metterklump.

Mr. Lord fainted delicately.

GEORGE KOOTZ, master criminal, sat in his hotel room reading about himself in the paper. The wave of mysterious robberies he had committed was nearly as prominent in the news as the approaching end of the world. George was basking in a warm glow of self-righteous anger at the world.

Each of his robberies had been committed in the heat of rage, each had been done to show *them* that *they* couldn't think things like that about him and get away with it. His theft of the bracelet had been touched off by the sight of Chi-Chi, who reminded him of the girl whose dress he had torn at the high school dance. He had snatched the bauble off her wrist because he wanted revenge, and more obscurely, because it was a symbol of his unattainable desire for the girl at the dance, and for Chi-Chi. The girl at the dance had been the belle of the ball and Chi-Chi was the current belle of the television networks.

Subsequently he had stolen Mr. Metterklump's car and hurled it into the river. This was particularly disturbing to Mr. Metterklump because he had been about to climb into it and drive off.

He had seized a large sack of currency just as it was being carried from an armored car into the bank. He had done this because one of the guards reminded him of his father.

There were many other similar incidents. He was easily the most prominent individual in the news, just as Mortimer's Object was the most prominent thing.

Mortimer's Object had by now been rechristened in journalese. All of the papers referred to it simply and succinctly as Doom. The day when the moon was to hit Salome was known as Doomsday. George Kootz read with bitter amusement about the world's frantic efforts to avert Doomsday.

"That'll really show 'em," he thought to himself. He picked up the telephone and dialed the number of the Daily Gazette.

When the Gazette answered he snarled into the mouthpiece, "You wanna know who's making things disappear? It's me, George Kootz. Whadda

you think of that?" He gave his address and hung up.

The first policeman assigned to investigate what was presumed by the authorities to be a crank telephone call had a rough time with George Kootz. Sergeant Bertram was a solemn man who believed in the ultimate triumph of law and order. He was an old hand at dealing with the pickpocket, the petty grifter, and the sneak thief, the underdogs of the underworld. He was accustomed to seeing these miserable people cringe when he spoke, fawn upon him and beg for mercy.

When Sergeant Bertram entered George Kootz' room and caught him red-handed with his loot spread out on the bed he was triumphant. He drew his gun and ordered Kootz to put up his hands. Kootz made a very rude remark and Bertram suddenly felt his gun snatched from his grasp by an unseen force. The gun wound up in George's hand, pointing at Sergeant Bertram.

"Take off your pants," said George.

"You can't get away with this," sputtered the sergeant.

Bertram felt himself lifted about two feet off the floor and slammed into the wall. He found this procedure somewhat unsettling.

"I said take off your pants," snarled George.

Sergeant Bertram took off his pants. He stood miserably in the middle of the room and watched his trousers sail out of the window and hang themselves on top of the lamp-post across the busy street.

"Now go get 'em," ordered George.

THE timely arrival of a reporter and a photographer from the *Gazette* while he was retrieving his trousers made that the blackest day in Sergeant Bertram's history.

Subsequent attempts to apprehend George Kootz resulted in the loss of a small arsenal of weapons, the destruction of several squad cars, and a Roman holiday for the press. Stories about the invincible bandit provided the man in the streets with welcome relief from the tension of worrying about the approach of Doom.

Efforts to capture Kootz were abandoned as futile for the time being and a twenty-four hour detail was assigned to shadow him and study his habits.

In the end the capture of this thorn in the side of the police department proved to be ridiculously simple. He had developed the habit of spending the evening in a procession leading from one bar to another. His shadow merely went along behind him until he was thoroughly soused and then slipped a dose of chloral hydrate into his glass. George Kootz went out like a light.

He was lugged off to a waiting Black Maria and transported to the city jail. There he was unceremoniously dumped on a metal cot. His wrist was handcuffed to the bars of his cell by means of a device fitted with a combination lock instead of a key. This arrangement had been thoughtfully provided by the precinct captain who rightly feared that otherwise George would use his strange powers to obtain the key and unlock himself.

The following morning the news of George's capture vied for prominence with the announcement that Congress had allocated one hundred billion dollars to implement various schemes for averting the coming disaster. It was proposed that the world's entire stock of A-bombs be fitted to a fleet of rockets and sent out to intercept Doom. It was admitted by most scientists that this would merely make a sizable dent in the planetoid without deflecting it from its course. It was also planned to make a fleet of gigantic spaceships which would be used to transport as many of the earth's people to Mars as could be carried in the short remaining time. Another plan was the building of an artificial satellite which would be crammed with as many people as it would hold. These people would wait until the cataclysm was over and then, if there happened to be any-

thing left, would return to earth and begin again.

A SPECIAL board with extraordinary powers was set up to investigate other possibilities. On the board were the entire general staff of the Army, all of the cabinet members, and several officials of the newly organized Society for the Prevention of Doomsday.

It was the chairman of this board that called Captain Brutesnaker as he and George Kootz were exchanging unpleasantries on the morning following Kootz' capture.

Captain Brutesnaker found it a little difficult to answer the telephone because George Kootz was holding him pinned against the ceiling with no visible means of support. Sergeant Bertram, who at the moment was obeying the law of gravity, picked up the receiver and said, "Captain Brutesnaker's office."

He listened for a moment and then looked up at the ceiling. "It's for you, chief," he said.

"You fool, tell 'em I'll call back."

"It's long distance, from Washington."

"Why don't you answer the phone?" asked Kootz. The instrument in question flew up and struck Captain Brutesnaker ungently in the stomach. Brutesnaker grunted and held the phone to his ear. As he listened to the voice on the other end of the line a wave of crimson rose from under his collar and spread over his already red face.

"It's who," he asked. He listened for a moment. "Yes, that's right. We got him, sir."

After a pause he spoke again. "We've got him locked up so he can't get away. He's being pretty nasty, but after a visit to the goldfish bowl he'll soften up." Brutesnaker listened for a few moments, his face getting longer and longer.

"I'm afraid I never thought of that, sir," he said. "Yeah, I see what you mean. I'll do my best, but you'd better send somebody quick. I ain't getting along so good with him myself. No matter what I do he ain't going to like me." He hung up the phone which fell with a crash to the floor when he absentmindedly let go of it. He looked down at Kootz.

"Goddamit, I sure hate to do it; but I gotta," he said more to himself than to anyone else. "Look fella," he said to Kootz. "It's all been a mistake. Why don't you let me down and let's us talk this thing over?"

"Okay," said Kootz. As he spoke Captain Brutesnaker came once again under the influence of gravity and fell eight feet to the floor. He landed with a bone crushing crash and lay still, peacefully asleep. Sergeant Bertram, who had observed these proceedings in silence, was a sorely puzzled man.

WHILE these events were transpiring a top-level discussion of what to do with George Kootz was going on in the Pentagon Building in Washington.

"Anybody have any ideas about how we are going to handle this bird?" asked the Chief of Staff of the United States Army.

"It's difficult to make a diagnosis from newspaper reports," said Dr. Divine. "However, I would hazard a guess that we are dealing with a compensatory neurosis with paranoid overtones. If we had plenty of time we could institutionalize him and work for a complete adjustment to the environment. Then we wouldn't have much trouble persuading him to use this strange power of his to avert the coming disaster.

"Harrumph," said the senator. "It is clearly the duty of every red-blooded American to come to the aid of his country in the time of emergency. What makes you think that this man will fail to put his shoulder to the—ah—wheel, particularly since he'll be saving his own life too?"

"It seems to me," answered Dr. Divine, "that any person with the nor-

mal instinct of self-preservation, and with this special gift of Kootz' would by now have thought of the idea of using it to deflect that cosmic cue ball. Since he hasn't done so I'm afraid we'll have to assume there is a pretty strong death wish involved.

"I say draft the fellow and make him do it," said the Chief of Staff.

"How?" inquired Dr. Divine.

"Couldn't you give him shock treatments or something?" asked the President of the Society for the Prevention of Doomsday.

"Shock treatment is a great help in the symptomatic relief of some kinds of disorders. Unfortunately it is not a cure, and since we don't know what part of the brain Kootz uses for this teleportation, we might find that we had killed the goose that was about to lay the golden egg."

"I hope this guy isn't going to lay an egg," said the Chief of Staff. "By the way, how do we know that Kootz can move something as big and as far away as Doom?"

"We don't," answered Divine. "We're just hoping."

"Well, we aren't going to find out by sitting here talking," barked the Chief of Staff. "Divine, you're better equipped for such a job than any of us. You get on out there and see what you can do with this man. As you know, Congress has given this committee unlimited powers. You are authorized to give Kootz whatever you have to bring him in line. A lot depends on you, Divine. If you, as the foremost psychiatrist in the country, can't handle this, I'm afraid we're licked."

"I'll certainly do what I can," said Divine dryly, and departed.

AFTER his first interview with Kootz Dr. Divine made a beeline for the vulgar, luxurious apartment of Chi-Chi Chandor. Chi-Chi felt comfortable in his presence because he was a portly, middle-aged gentleman who stared absentmindedly at her bosom while he talked to her. A little like Daddy Snookums, she thought. After the doctor had talked for a while she felt less at ease in his presence.

Dr. Divine explained to her that she could help save the earth from destruction. He told her that she was a mother-image to George Kootz and that with proper handling on her part he could be persuaded to use his power to deflect the approaching Doom. Chi-Chi had no objection to the idea of saving the world, particularly since she herself would obviously benefit. She had no moral scruples about using her natural endowments to that end. Dr. Divine was able to offer her enough compensation to make the loss of Mr. Metterklump's patronage seem inconsequential. What made her nervous was the idea that she would have to learn a part and play it without deviation.

The writer who was responsible for Chi-Chi's television program never gave her more than five lines in any one show because she was incapable of memorizing more than that. In addition, her delivery of the simplest line was sure to be wooden and unconvincing.

"Jeéz, Dr. Divine," she said sadly, "I'd sure like to do it, but I don't think I can. I wouldn't know how to—what was it you said—bolster his ego and subtly dominate him at the same time."

"Let's take an example," said Dr. Divine, kindly. "What would you do if Kootz wanted to take you to dinner at a hamburger stand and you wanted to go to the Bel-Air? Let's pretend I'm Kootz and I've just suggested we go to Joe's Joint for a cheeseburger with french fries. Now what are you going to do?"

"Oh, that's easy," said Chi-Chi. She got up and walked over to Dr. Divine's chair. She slid into his lap and ruffled his hair. She nibbled the lobe of his ear and pressed her bosom against his chest.

"Gee honey," she cooed, "I just don't think it's right for an important man like you to go to a place like that for dinner. I think you ought to go to a high class place like the Bel-Air."

"Oh hell," said Dr. Divine, "just be yourself and don't worry. You'll do." As an afterthought he added, "It's just occurred to me that it might be a good idea. Going to the Bel-Air for dinner, I mean. How about it?" He punctuated the request with what he hoped was a paternal pat on Chi-Chi's shapely derrière.

"Gee honey, I'd like to, but Mr. Metterklump is coming tonight and I've gotta tell him he can't have any more dates until after Doomsday."

Dr. Divine decided it would be just as well to stay out of the clutches of a young lady like Miss Chandor.

"One more thing," said Dr. Divine. "Don't ever try to get Kootz to dance with you. He had what amounted to a traumatic experience at a high school dance and heaven only knows what might happen if that were repeated."

"What's a traumatic experience?" asked Chi-Chi. "No, wait. I'm not sure I want to know. I sure love to dance though."

"Well don't do it with Kootz. You might precipitate a complete psychotic break if you do."

"I sure wouldn't want to do that, whatever it is. Okay, so I won't dance with him."

"That's all I can think of at the moment," said Dr. Divine. "If there is anything else you need to know I'll get in touch with you. I'd better go now."

Chi-Chi got out of his lap.

WHEN Chi-Chi met George Kootz for the first time she began to wonder if there weren't such a thing as a fate worse than death after all. But since she had practically no mind she soon stopped worrying about it and made a satisfactory adjustment to the situation. As long as she had four or five meals a day, a luxurious apartment, lots of jewelry, the admiration of the television audience, and someone to pay the premiums on her bosom insurance, she remained free from any basic conflicts.

Mr. Metterklump went about for a few days feeling and exhibiting a fine sense of the sacrifice he was making in giving up Chi-Chi so that the human race might continue. Besides, he soon struck up an acquaintance with the Countess Alexandra "Baloons" von Blixen, the leading lady of the local burlesque circuit. This acquaintanceship soon ripened into a warm, intimate friendship.

George Kootz, on the other hand, found it virtually impossible to adjust to anything. He was at once delighted by his success with Chi-Chi and abnormally suspicious because it had happened so easily. He went about for several days nervously jerking chairs out from under everyone, making cars collide at intersections, and causing waiters to spill hot soup down the necks of their customers. There wasn't anything really malicious about these actions, it was simply that George was so ill at ease that he didn't quite know what to do with himself.

At first the general public was a little annoyed by Kootz' behavior, but when it was announced in the press that Kootz could save the world everyone began being very nice to him, without any prompting.

Dr. Divine was in charge of the campaign that resulted in Kootz consenting to try his power on Doom. He was ably assisted by a staff of professional actors whose sole function was to appear from time to time and admire Kootz.

Kootz seemed to like Dr. Divine. Divine's whole strategy was to make Kootz enjoy life as much as possible and to make him feel admired and accepted by the society in which he lived. Although Divine pursued this course with a reasonable degree of subtlety, he also took care to let Kootz know that Divine was partially responsible for Kootz' success. And since Kootz had a tendency to mess things up when he struck out on his own, he came to depend more and more on Divine for advice about every move he made

Dr. Divine shrewdly saw to it that Kootz identified the use of his strange power with social approval. He arranged that Kootz give demonstrations before learned societies. The members of these societies had been primed beforehand to abandon their habitual scepticism and to avoid such remarks as: "It's a trick," or "It's done with mirrors," or remarks about charlatanism or mass hypnotism.

Kootz also gave demonstrations before popular audiences. At some of these there would be women in the audience who would moan in enraptured voices, "Oh Georgie," and swoon in the aisles. In view of Kootz' personal attributes, or lack thereof, these had to be professional actresses.

Chi-Chi kept George feeling good when he wasn't out in public.

The plans of the government for averting Doomsday underwent considerable revision. All of the nations on earth breathed a sigh of relief and decided they could keep their atom bombs to throw at each other instead of at Doom. The plan to build a fleet of spaceships was abandoned as prohibitively expensive. The plan to build an artificial satellite was continued with the thought that it might come in handy for other purposes.

While Doom was still several million miles away Kootz consented to attempt to move the moon. This was so that the questions of whether he would succeed would be settled once and for all. His attempt was made with no publicity so as to avoid a panic if he failed.

IT WAS argued by some that the situation could not be repeated if he removed the moon permanently. This argument produced a wave of bitter, violent protest from artists and poets and from a number of advertizing agencies that based their perfume ads on things that are likely to happen in the moonlight. So this scheme was abandoned.

Kootz had no trouble in moving the moon. He had assisting him a corps of the country's most prominent astronomers. They sat with their eyes glued to the eyepieces of a battery of telescopes to observe the results and to help him get the moon back in its proper place. Since the test had not been announced, a good many people who happened to be looking at the moon when the phenomenon occurred were convinced that Doomsday had arrived. The result was a panic that exceeded anything Wall Street or Orson Welles had ever been able to produce. By the next morning everything quieted down. The results were minor compared to what would have happened if the moon had really hit Salome.

As Doom came closer and closer the world's astronomers busied themselves with determining when George Kootz would have to act in order to avert Doomsday with a reasonable margin of safety. They came to the conclusion that it must be not later than April first.

Such a worldshaking event (if that is the proper description) as the thwarting of Doom cannot be allowed to happen in obscurity. The thing must be done with an appropriate amount of pomp and circumstance. There must be a gathering of notables, there must be representatives of the press to send out hourly bulletins, there must be food and drink and the fanfare of trumpets. The party that was planned for the night of April first was to be almost as elegant as a Hollywood preview. The only thing lacking would be the searchlights which could not be used lest they interfere with the work of the newsreel cameramen who would attempt to photograph the event.

Dr. Divine treated Kootz in much the same manner as a trainer would a prize fighter on the day of his first shot at the title. He saw to it that George had a light lunch and an easily digestible dinner. He persuaded him to indulge in a short workout in which he moved the furniture around the room of Chi-Chi's apartment. Before he had a chance to

tire himself he was persuaded to lie down for a short nap.

During the short ride to the Municipal Auditorium, in a limousine thoughtfully provided by the State Department and chauffeured by a secret service man, Dr. Divine talked soothingly to George while Chi-Chi held his hand. Chi-Chi was very happy because she had privately resolved that this would be the last of her relationship with Kootz. But tonight she would make the most of her close association with the most important man on earth.

Dr. Divine was nervous. He felt that if anything went wrong everyone would blame him. He had done everything he could to prevent unfortunate occurrences. For example, he had overridden the General's demand to meet Kootz before the ceremony because he was afraid that the General would frighten Kootz and make him do something impulsive.

Kootz was thinking that on the following day he would ask Chi-Chi to marry him. He was also thinking up ways to punish her if she refused.

The Municipal Auditorium had been connected to the observatory by radio, television, telephone, and in case these should fail, by carrier pigeon. When Kootz arrived all was in readiness and everyone was standing around nervously hoping it wasn't all a hoax.

ALL eyes were focused on George Kootz as he walked into the long, high-ceilinged room. All the high military personnel, all the congressmen, all the ambassadors, and all the representatives of the press were standing in a large circle around the center of the room. Into this clear space Kootz walked and stood, a lonely figure, in the middle of the hall.

The room was hushed and charged with tension. Each man's hopes for the future were pinned on Kootz. As Kootz took his position a solemn, dignified voice from the public address system asked,

"Are you ready Mr. Kootz?"

"Yes," said George, with a hint of a quaver in his voice.

"Then proceed," commanded the voice, respectfully.

Kootz' face assumed a look of intense concentration. His brows drew together and his fists clenched. He seemed to be holding his breath and everyone else in the room forgot to breathe as they strained to help him in his difficult task.

One minute passed, then two minutes. Three minutes. Five minutes. Finally the Chief of Staff could stand the tension no longer.

"What's happening?" he demanded.

"I can't do it," wailed Kootz, with two large tears trickling down his cheeks.

"Why not?" barked the General.

"I don't know," moaned Kootz. "I just can't move Doom."

"Try moving something else," commanded the General.

Kootz picked the General up and tossed him across the room, setting him down, by chance, beside Dr. Divine. The General was shaken but he still retained enough presence of mind to demand of Divine,

"For God's sake, can't you do something?"

"Not right now," answered Divine. "However, I have a strong suspicion I know what the trouble is. I'll have to make a few tests and perhaps run him through some intensive psycho-therapy before I can be sure."

"How long will it take?" inquired the General, apprehensively.

"Not less than two weeks," answered the doctor.

"Well, do whatever you have to," said the General. "Only remember that our deadline is just two and a half weeks away."

"Don't worry," said Divine. "After all, even if it turns out that for some reason he can't budge Doom, we can, as a last resort, have him move the moon out of the way. He's already demonstrated that he can do that."

While this conversation was going on

the gathering was becoming more and more restless. The soft murmur of voices rose in crescendo to a shout of, "We want action."

After a series of instructions from the General, the announcer's voice came soothingly over the public address system:

"Ladies and gentlemen, due to circumstances beyond our control there will be a slight delay in the aversion of Doom. The conditions are not quite favorable tonight and so the military authorities and the scientists and Mr. Kootz have decided to postpone the event. Do not be alarmed. The delay is only temporary."

The band struck up *Nearer My God to Thee* as Dr. Divine led Kootz from the hall. As Kootz left, Chi-Chi stared after him as though he were something less than human.

TWO weeks and two days later, Dr. Divine sat in the office of the Chief of Staff. He beamed expansively, and as he talked he toyed with a large, fragrant cigar.

"General," he said, "this was the most successful case I've ever handled. My hypothesis turned out to be exactly correct and Kootz responded amazingly to the treatment I gave him."

"Wonderful," said the General. "Tell me about it. I want to know what the trouble was."

"You remember," began Divine, "that I mentioned the possibility of a death wish when we first discussed the matter? My diagnosis was quite accurate. As a matter of fact, Kootz has been unconsciously using that strange power he had for years and years. Under deep hypnosis and narco-synthesis I found that he himself had actually summoned Doom from another solar system."

"If he did it himself, why was he willing to try to move it out of the way?" asked the General.

"Oh, he didn't do it with his conscious mind. You see, the subconscious will play some strange tricks. Even though consciously he wanted to save the world, down underneath it all was a hatred of society so strong that he was willing to destroy himself in order to hit back at the rest of the world. And since it was his subconscious wish that summoned Doom, it isn't any wonder that his conscious mind was powerless to deflect it."

"And you've removed his subconscious wish to destroy the world?" asked the General.

"Completely," replied the doctor. "I would venture to say that George Kootz is as well adjusted to our culture as anyone alive today. He'd do anything he could to preserve it. I'd almost call him the world's most normal person. I'd also say that the transformation of Kootz is a feat unparalleled in the annals of modern psychiatry."

"Excellent, excellent," said the General, rubbing his hands together, "Tell me doctor, when can we have him go to work on Doom again?"

"Well, ah, I'm afraid that's another matter. Teleportation is an abnormal talent, and now that Kootz is a normal person, he no longer has it."

At this bombshell the General's face blanched.

"My God, Divine, what are we going to do?"

"I don't know," answered Divine, absentmindedly. "That is your problem now. But just think what a lovely case history this will make for the Journal of the International Psychological Association."

Read* WHISTLE STOP IN SPACE, a *Manning Draco novel by

Kendell Foster Crossen, in the August issue of

THRILLING WONDER STORIES—*25c at All Stands!*

(Universal-International)

Carlson meets violence with a threat of violence

It's Here From OUTER

YOUR chance to see the first 4-D movie—that's three dimensions plus a science fiction plot—comes with the filming of Ray Bradbury's story, IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE made at *Universal-International*.

Given carte blanche for plot, Bradbury chose a theme which has the elements of a sociological study of the future. This, plus Hollywood hoopla is a little different from what we would like to see, but it *is* traveling in the right direction.

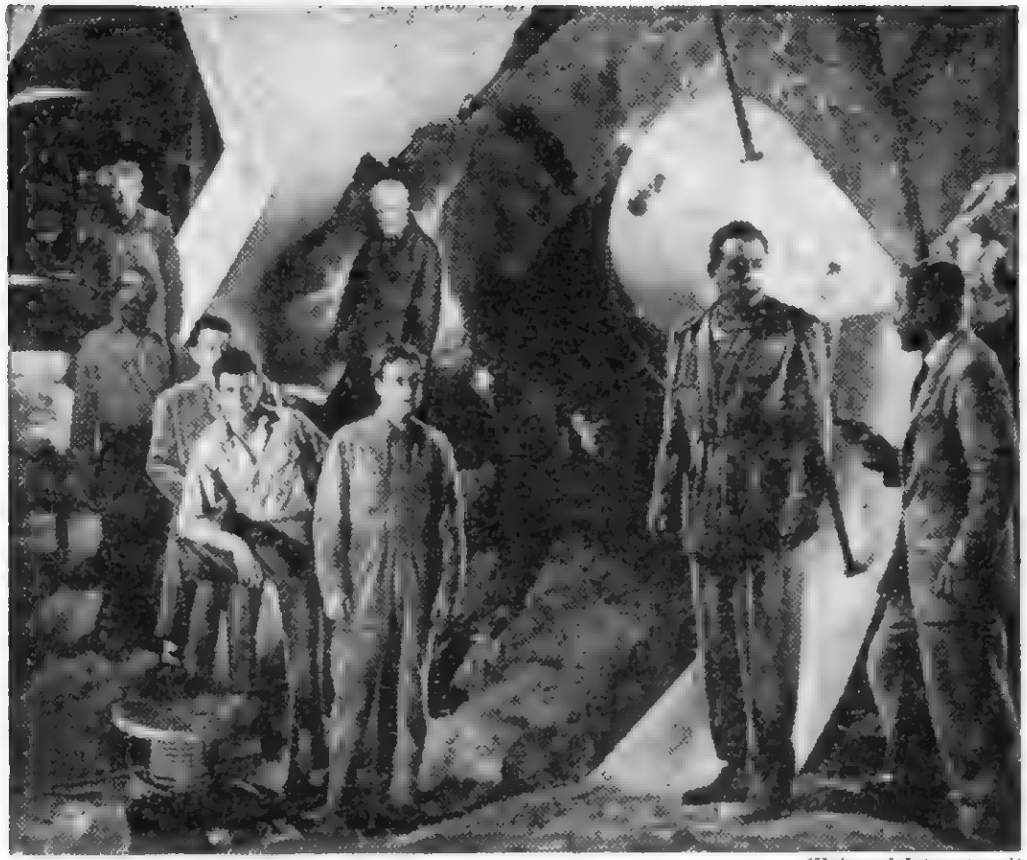
Bradbury wrote his original story on the premise that, when inhabitants of different planets come into contact with each other, a conflict is sure to result.

Harry Niemeyer of *U-I's* Hollywood staff asked Bradbury how he came to this conclusion. "My reasoning is this," said Ray. "If there *is* any life on other planets, it is doubtful if it has developed into human form. Even if these creatures—they may be spiders for all we know—are intellectually developed beyond humans so that they have abolished war and conflict, they're in for a shock when they meet the people of Earth. In my story I envisioned space beings landing here by mistake. Once they're here they take a look around and work frantically to get out into space again.

"That's where their superintelligence comes in. They want no part of wars and conflict."

To get on: Strange things are happening in Arizona, where science fiction must now be zooming real estate values. (You can't tell a space opera from a horse opera without a program). Richard Carlson, playing a young scientist, and Barbara Rush, his schoolmarm girlfriend are interrupted in their laboratory tête-a-tête (the park bench now being obsolete) by what appears to be a meteor.

Rushing out to see wha hoppa, it doesn't take Carlson long to figure out that the strange-shaped, metallic object which he finds half-covered with debris isn't a meteor after all. When the hatch of the spaceship ('cause that's what it is, chillun), lifts and closes, strange



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SPACE—on the Screen!

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Carlson's theory, that an invisible extra-terrestrial has exited a spaceship is scoffed at by all—including the local sheriff, who, incidentally, is Carlson's rival for the schoolmarm.

She loyally agrees with his premise, harboring a secret suspicion that he may be suffering from an overdose of Arizona sun, until they both start seeing things.

Well, the visitors from space have their troubles, and with the intrepid assistance of scientist Carlson finally—to borrow a phrase from horse opera—light a shuck right out of there. In a blaze of light they go back to other, more hospitable worlds. We'll go along with them on that one.

The Xenomorph, Bradbury's XT creation, and liberally translated from the Greek as "the little man who isn't there" posed an interesting production problem. It was materialized by a studio plumber and special effects man utilizing carbon smoke and an evil-smelling mineral oil. After a few complaints from other members of the cast, the Glob (as it became known to familiars) became kissing-sweet with the addition of a drop of lilac cologne.

Cliff Stine, an able and talented cameraman had the unique job of filming nothing in three dimensions. He can be credited with some very effective camera work.

Incidentally, producer William Alland is no newcomer to the scare-the-bejupiters-out-of-the-customers school of art. He was Orson Welles' production manager when the boy genius dreamed up his now famous "War of the Worlds" Broadcast.

All around this one deserves a double A for effort. With top talents concentrating on bringing science fiction to the screen, we look forward to bigger and better productions all the time.

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With a quick step Watson was beside the woman

The Man Who Looked Like STEINMETZ

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

HE LOOKED from Schultz to me, and because I was behind the desk he knew I was the man he wanted. He limped past my worried secretary and carefully set the box on the desk.

"Mr. Collins?" he asked. "I am Joseph Liederman. I want to see you."

I nodded vaguely. I was already jumpy enough—as was everybody working for the company—without looking up and seeing standing in my door a man who looked enough like Steinmetz to be his twin brother. If I hadn't known that Steinmetz was dead I would have thought the wizard from Schenectady

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was paying us a surprise visit.

Steinmetz was a little man with black eyebrows and a bulging forehead. Joseph Liederman was a little man with black eyebrows and a bulging forehead. At least he said his name was Joseph Liederman. . . .

You know how a new and unexpected situation will leave you groping in the dark. You don't know exactly what to say or do. Especially if you are already upset.

It wasn't that I am not accustomed to meeting inventors. I meet enough of them to know how to talk to them. It was the fact that this fellow looked like Steinmetz. That, and the trouble we had been having.

I sat there and stared at him for several seconds. My secretary closed the door as she went out and I recovered a little of my shattered poise.

"Er—yes, I am Collins. Sit down. What can I do for you, Mr. Liederman?"

"I understand," he began, "that your company has been caused of trouble a great amount due to the fact that fluctuating your power output has been. I am sorry. Of course, I had noticed that my own lights blinked when the primary coil was started turning, but I did not realize that there was over your lines a kickback which interfered for a few seconds with the generation of your power—"

There was the strong hint of a foreign accent in his voice and he didn't always get the words in their proper positions.

Schultz took a long, deep breath and then seemed to quit breathing. He is head of our experimental and testing laboratories. He has a long horse face, frowsy red hair, and he looks like he just got off the train from Podunk and is seeing the city for the first time. But he has a degree from one of the biggest engineering schools in the country and he knows more about currents than any man we employ. He inhaled deeply and the air whistled through his nostrils.

I batted my eyes a couple of times. What kind of a nut was Liederman?

"I—er—admit we have been a little worried about minor variations in our power output. No trouble, you understand. Just minor fluctuations," I answered. I tried to sound casual and convincing, but it was a little more than I could manage at the moment.

MINOR variations, hell! Schultz hadn't had enough sleep in months because of those variations. Neither had any of our engineers or linesmen, nor even President Watson, nor the Board of Directors.

Persistently, over a period of months, the power we were supplying had been subject to erratic variations. At almost any time during the day or the night, the power would drop suddenly, motors would slow and the lights of the city would dim. Several seconds would elapse, and then the lights would gradually return to their normal brilliance. Every user of light or power would call us up and want to know what in the devil was the matter with us, didn't we know how to operate a utility company, or didn't we give a damn about service, or what?

Our engineers had checked every generator we owned and reported the generators in perfect condition. Our linesmen had gone over every foot of high-lines and removed every leak . . . and the lights still blinked!

We knew that nobody was stealing our power and that it wasn't leaking away from us. Our engineers were going nuts trying to figure out how laws they regarded as immutable could go haywire. For it boiled down to just that.

The high pressure steam hummed through the turbines, the generators cooed to themselves, and suddenly they didn't produce their normal output.

We had been going over plans for further checking when Liederman came in.

"As soon as I understood what was happening, a filter I installed and your troubles stopped. That was three days ago."

Schultz exhaled his breath in a panting sigh. I just sat there and stared at Liederman. Of course, one of our em-

ployees might have told him that we were having trouble. Possible he was trying to take advantage of our difficulties to sell us something.

But how did he know that the variations had ceased three days ago? I blinked at him. Inside of me something was turning cold. You never know when another Einstein is going to pop out of obscurity and upset all scientific thinking. You never know how much scientific theory is right and how much is wrong, because the scientists—even our engineers who take our money for what they are supposed to know—are in reality only doing a lot of high-calibre guesswork when you get down to fundamentals.

"Did—did you cause those variations?" Schultz interposed softly.

Liederman inclined his head in a grave courteous nod!

"I am sorry, yes. The primary coil of my large generator was motor-driven and the motor was drawing its current from your lines. When the primary started turning, there was a momentary kick-back over your lines and this kick-back neutralized the current your generators were producing. It was unfortunate and I had not intended to cause you inconvenience."

There was silence in the room when he finished speaking. I could dimly hear my secretary pecking away at her typewriter in the next room. The shouts of the newsboys, the tooting of auto horns, the clamor of the bell of a street car, came up from the streets below us. The familiar sounds of the city . . . but here there was labored silence.

REMEMBER my position and background. My title, assistant to the president, sounds very nice, but about all it means in my case is that I am the guy who sees the men who have invented gadgets they think we will buy at fancy prices. The things they try to sell us!

My job is to tell the inventors in the nicest possible way that we are very sorry but we cannot use the idea. You know—pat 'em on the back while you kick 'em in the pants. And if a worthwhile idea comes along, I test it and report to the president. Every big company has a man who sees the inventors. Ninety-nine percent of the gadgets brought to us are worthless. But that one percent—

Brother, you better watch out for that one percent, for you never know when some timid little man is going to come tiptoeing into your office and lay on your desk a gadget that is worth millions.

I realized then that I was staring at the box Liederman had put on my desk.

"I don't understand," Schultz seemed to whisper. "What does your generator produce?"

Liederman's face wrinkled into a half frown. His eyes—black, they were, as black as midnight—seemed to turn inward, as if he were trying to look inside his own skull and find an answer to a perplexing problem.

"That I do not know," he answered finally. "My generator produces a force that is much cheaper and more efficient than electricity. But I do not know the exact nature of that force. . . ."

I stuck my neck out.

"You are trying to sell us something and don't know what it is?" I rasped.

He looked at me.

"You sell electricity, don't you? Do you know what it is?"

My face was probably a beautiful shade of red. He had me. I don't know what electricity is, in spite of the fact that the company I work for generates and sells it. Nobody from the president down knows what we sell. The engineers, with charts and graphs and slide rules, know a few things this force will do, and unless you are familar with these engineers, they will give you the impression they know what they are talking about.

If you pin them down, they will go off into theory and finally start giving you answers in pure mathematics, but if you boil down all their theories and formulae, you will find they add up to exactly nothing. Smart men, these engineers; but the things they don't know would fill the Doomsday Book.

"But we know what electricity will do," I came back at him.

"And I know what this new force will do," he answered patiently. "Motors it will turn, bulbs it will light, it will flow over wires. I think, perhaps it is of electricity a new form."

Schultz looked at me. He was begging me to shut up. He turned to Liederman.

"Could you give us a demonstration of this generator?" he asked.

"Certainly. That was my purpose in calling on you." He pointed to the box sitting on my desk.

"There is the household generator of the future. The equipment housed in that box costs only a few dollars. At the cost of a few cents a month, it will develop enough power to operate a normal household."

Schultz didn't bat an eye lash. Nor did I. But I knew, at that moment, that Liederman had better be a liar, had better be another cracked inventor. Because if he was telling the truth—well, you figure it out. We have about thirty-seven million dollars invested in generating equipment and transmission lines. It would become junk almost overnight. What a splash that gadget would make in our economic civilization. You think about it. I don't dare.

BUT I knew, in that moment, that a mighty big one percent had come tiptoeing into my office, so big a one percent that I didn't know what to do about it.

"Ben Collins," said Schultz out of the corner of his mouth. "Let's take Mr. Liederman and his box down to my lab and do some checking."

That was perfectly all right with me.

Schultz started to pick up the box but Liederman brushed his hands aside. "No, no, sir. I will carry that." He lifted it like it was full of TNT. In a way, I guess it was.

As we started through the private exit, my secretary came from the reception room. She closed the door before she spoke.

"Mr. . . . Mr. Collins, there are two men out here, asking for Mr. Liederman."

Liederman spun to face her.

"Tell them I am not here," he hissed. "Tell them you never heard of me. You understand?" His voice was a sibilant whisper.

Liederman's words scared the girl. She drew back away from him.

He turned to me.

"I am sorry, Mr. Collins. Two men have been annoying me for about six weeks. How they ever learned about, I cannot understand. They have even tried to break into my workshop. The police I do not care to appeal to. The men want this." He hugged the box. "And they must not have it!"

Schultz grunted.

"I'll say they must not have it."

I didn't know whether they were bill collectors or rivals from another company trying to get hold of Liederman before we got to him, but I knew what to do about this.

"Tell the men we know of no Mr. Liederman, that we never heard of him."

"But—" she persisted.

"If they as much as smile at you, call the cops."

"Yes sir. But—"

Her insistence annoyed me.

"But what?" I snapped.

"But they have guns," she whispered. "I know one of them has a pistol. I saw the bulge in his pocket and I thought you would want to know."

It was so preposterous that I laughed at her.

"Nonsense! You've been reading detective stories again. Go on out there and tell them we never heard of anybody by the name of Liederman."

Schultz already had the door open. Even if there had been forty men in the reception room, each with two guns, he wouldn't have given a damn. He wanted to see that generator work. Anyhow, the girl was probably imagining things.

Schultz has been with us about six years. He is about thirty-three, only a couple of years younger than I am. I

have frequently worked with him in testing gadgets offered to us, but this was the first time I had ever seen him excited. Every red hair on his head was trying to stand on end.

He knows more of the theory and practice of electrical engineering than I do. My job is to know dollar values.

Usually he is the height of dignified aloofness when considering some new idea for us. He doesn't have to look twice to know whether it won't work. Or if it will.

He led us down to his lab. He kicked out his assistant and locked the door.

Liederman set his box on the table and Schultz took charge.

The box was about eighteen inches long, eight inches wide, and twelve high. The top was hinged. Liederman folded the top back and Schultz and I stuck our noses in to see what we could see. I was disappointed, but Schultz was panting like a kid in toyland.

TUCKED down in one corner of the box were four small dry cells. They were wired in series to a small motor that was coupled directly to a compact coil of wire so arranged that when the motor turned the coil turned with it. Around that coil, but not touching it, was an unorthodox secondary coil wound with heavy copper ribbon. I guess it was copper. It looked like it.

The windings of the secondary crossed and criss-crossed at crazy angles so that it almost made you cock-eyed to try to follow the windings. Set on each side of the secondary was—remember the old peanut tubes. They took a volt and a half on the filament—the voltage of an ordinary dry cell—and whatever you happened to have handy to use on the plate.

Liederman had two of them on each side of his secondary coil. Obviously they were used to produce some kind of an oscillation. Or were they? I tried to follow the wiring diagram but there were too many condensers and coils in that box. The ends of the secondary winding came up to an ordinary outlet plug in the side of the box.

"If you have meters—" said Liederman vaguely.

What did he think we were running? Schultz snapped questions at him.

"AC or DC? Voltage limits?"

"This force cannot be called either alternating or direct," he answered. "And, within reasonable limits, I can produce any voltage you desire."

That stunned Schultz for a few seconds, made him a little doubtful. He laid a heavy meter on the table, ran a plug to the outlet on the side of the box.

"Okay, Mr. Liederman. Produce me current at one hundred and ten volts, please."

Liederman nodded. He thrust deft fingers into the box and shifted a series of small switches that apparently controlled input. He moved a final switch and the peanut tubes glowed faintly. The primary coil started turning as the tiny motor picked up speed.

Liederman pointed to his motor.

"In my larger installation at my workshop," he said, "the motor was naturally larger and was wired from city current, your power fluctuations resulting—"

Schultz didn't hear him. He was staring at the meter on the table and he looked like a man seeing something he cannot believe. If he had known as a positive fact that the next second the earth would open and swallow him, I do not believe he would have been any more excited. His eyes were fixed and glassy. When he spoke, his voice was hushed with awe.

"Ben," he begged. "Will you look, please, and tell me if you see what I do—"

I looked. That damned meter was registering a current flow at one hundred and ten volts!

"Certainly," said Liederman softly. "You requested that voltage, did you not?"

Frankly, I was stunned. Ever since Liederman had walked into my office, looking enough like Steinmetz to be his twin brother, I had the feeling that I was

in the presence of one of the greatest men—if not the greatest—that this age has produced. But you can't get an idea like that through your head in minutes, or I can't. I've seen too many fakes. When that meter registered one hundred and ten volts . . . well, my eyes told me I saw it, but I hadn't realized what it meant in terms of dollars and cents, in human values, in economic, social, and political changes.

Yes, I mean political changes. Governments could fall because of this man. You don't need bands playing and speeches in the name of patriotism and roaring cannon to upset governments. One little invention would do it. Whitney's cotton gin.

What this invention really meant began to get to me when Schultz disconnected the output from the meter and connected it with a five horse-power motor with a brake arrangement that we use for testing.

OUT of that box, eighteen inches long and twelve inches high and eight wide, flowed enough current to set that heavy motor spinning. It was our motor, so there was no chance of trickery. Schultz slapped on the brakes and the leather smoked and the motor bucked and hummed—and turned. There was power in that box, wonder-working power.

You get what I was thinking. You take the internal combustion engine out of an automobile. You redesign the lines of the car so that you have direct drive on the axles. You insert one of Liederman's generators somewhere in the car, maybe a box bigger than this one, maybe not. Then you've got an electric automobile! You've got something just as fast as a car driven by an internal combustion engine, under better control, and operating for a fraction of a cent a mile!

Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? Everybody would have a car and would go places and see things. Beggars would ride. It sounds wonderful. Too damned wonderful. . . .

Did you ever ride down through Oklahoma and see, for miles and miles, the tall derricks marching by in orderly rows? Did you ever see the East Texas fields?

Maybe you haven't seen the wells of Oklahoma and Texas, maybe you don't know how vast and far-reaching is this mighty industry, but down on the corner you've seen a service station. You seem to see them on almost every corner. There are uncounted millions of dollars in wells and pipelines and refineries and service stations, and millions of men work to run the industry.

Get it? Liederman's generator would make the electric automobile so cheap that the internal combustion engine would be useless. That service station down on the corner would close up, and the two or three or four men who run it would have to look elsewhere for a job. No gas to sell today. Nobody wants to buy it.

Down in Oklahoma the derricks would rust in the sun and the rain. Good place for a desert and nobody would need it for much else.

The collapse of that one industry, oil, with millions of men thrown out of work and millions in capital gone, would throw our economic civilization into one grand mess.

That's what I was thinking while Schultz was leaning on the brake of our motor and Liederman was wrinkling his nose at the smell of burning leather.

I was also thinking about that thirty-seven million dollars we have invested in generating equipment and transmission lines. A lot of old people have invested their life's savings in our stocks, expecting a return in dividends that will keep them in their old age. Our stocks and bonds are in trust funds supporting widows and in other funds paying for Junior's college education.

Get it? No more dividends for the widows, no more college for Junior.

This is one city. There are hundreds of cities in this country, and the manufacture of electric power is one of our

biggest industries. Junk. Those generators and high lines. Worthless, those stocks and bonds.

WHEN the power first started fluctuating, our directors started holding secret meetings. Those directors are hard-headed business men. They had been afraid that natural law was going screwy and we wouldn't be able to generate current. They knew what that would mean, not only to us but to the whole country. Hell, instead of not being able to generate current, it would be possible to generate current too cheaply. Either way, it was catastrophe.

It sounds crazy, and it would be crazy, if we had a sound economic civilization, but we don't have such a civilization—witness the depression years. We have a patchwork economic foundation in which the security of the whole is dependent upon the security and well-being of every part.

Joseph Liederman, the man who looked like Steinmetz, was tossing a lighted match into a pile of gunpowder as big as the earth and the explosion that was sure to come would blow old Mother Earth right out of her orbit. Or blow from her surface the biped who thinks he runs it.

I don't think Liederman knew the nature of the dynamite with which he was playing. He was an inventor, a genius in his line, and he knew that his invention was valuable, but he didn't know what it would mean to humanity.

He stood there in our laboratory and wrinkled his nose at the foul odor of burning leather. The motor grunted as Schultz put pressure on the brake, but the motor kept on turning. There was power in that box, power to loose or to bind.

The hum of the motor built up to a high-pitched whine as Schultz kicked off the brake. He stood there panting, looking from the box to Liederman.

"Where—where is all that power coming from?" he asked.

"Where does electricity come from?" Liederman answered. "You shake your head. You do not know. Nor do I for certain know where the power of my generator comes from."

"But for every watt we get from a generator, we have to put a little more in," Schultz protested. "You put in the power of four dry cells and take out enough current to run this motor. You violate every known law of energy transfer."

"Yes," Liederman answered, tugging at his beard,—"yes, I believe this device violates every known natural law. But apparently it operates in accord with some law that we don't know—I suspect it is drawing energy from subspace. You are familiar with the action of a catalyst, a substance that produces a chemical reaction without itself being changed? This generator is similar to a catalyst; it draws power from subspace. It pierces through to some vast reservoir of power. That is all, I think."

Schultz wet his lips. He started to speak, but changed his mind. He wandered carelessly over to that box. Liederman limped after him. He watched Schultz from those black eyes of his.

But Schultz merely stared at the contents of the box. He wiped sweat from his forehead.

"What—what is the principle of the operation of that primary coil?" he asked.

Liederman smiled the foxiest smile I ever saw on the face of any man.

"I am not as yet ready to explain that principle," he answered.

Schultz took a long breath.

"I don't blame you. But why do you use radio tubes? At least they look like radio tubes—"

"They are radio tubes. But I will not tell you why—"

Well, my turn had come along. Schultz had said all he could say and it was my turn to speak my little piece, to toss off nonchalantly a few sentences that would solve our problem.

Talk, fool, talk! Act like you don't know how much depends on what you

say. Knock Liederman's generator. Say it isn't practical. Beat him down. Make him think it's no good. Try and make him think that!

SEE if you can buy it for a song. It will make your company enormously wealthy, maybe. If it does you will get a slice of that wealth. Winters in the south and summers in the north . . . a yacht . . . an estate in the country. They are all in that box, if you work it right. If you work it wrong, there is a world of misery in that box.

Talk, fool, talk! Act like you don't know you are making the most important speech in the history of the world.

I wet my lips.

"Mr. Liederman. Ah, wait here, will you? I would like Mr. Watson, our president, to see your generator."

I guess I'm a little man. I guess I'll always be a little man. I stammered through those words like a ten-year old. There was withering scorn on the horse face of Harry Schultz.

But, hell, what was I to do? I don't make history. I just watch it go by. I had to pass Liederman on to more capable hands.

Schultz took the key from his pocket and unlocked the door.

"Damn you, Ben Collins," he whispered, "you get Watson down here in a hell of a hurry. I'll hold this guy if I have to slug him."

He slammed the door behind me and I started down the corridor at a dead run. I almost ran over my secretary coming toward the lab. Two men were with her. She was marching along with her chin up in the air and didn't seem to see me. The men didn't glance at me either. There was no time to waste on apologies. I had to get Watson.

I interrupted him in an important conference, but I was so incoherent and excited that he saw something was wrong. He came along with me without a word of protest. He can make decisions. That is why he is president.

As we left his suite, there came the sound of a car backfiring, thin and muffled in the distance, Watson pricked up his ears. "Listen."

But the sound was not repeated.

The lab is two floors down from his office and at the end of a long corridor. We used the stairs because they are quicker. We went along the corridor.

I saw the door was open but I thought Schultz had merely forgotten to close it. My secretary had been headed toward the lab. It was at this point that I remembered the two men who had been with her.

The lab door was open. There were two men lying on the floor. Beyond them a woman was trying to get to her feet. With one quick step Watson was beside the woman.

I knelt beside one of the men. There was a hole in his chest. Blood was gurgling from the breast of Harry Schultz. A bullet had touched a lung. But he was alive and conscious. He scowled at me and gasped.

"To hell—with me— Take care of Liederman—"

He collapsed.

But the bullet that had struck Liederman had touched more than a lung. It had hit the heart.

Things began to happen awfully fast in that lab then. Watson knows how to give orders and have them obeyed. In what seemed less than seconds, the room was full of cops and an ambulance was moaning outside. As they lifted Schultz on the stretcher, he recovered enough to swear at me. "Damn you, Ben—get that —box—"

I looked at the lab table. Liederman's generator was gone.

THE two men? The cops, with one homicide and an attempted homicide on their hands, raised heaven and earth looking for them. They traced them by the box they carried. They found the taxi-driver who had picked them up outside our door. He had carried them seven blocks and had dropped them. The cops located the second cab they took. He had

carried them less than four blocks. There the trail ended. They must have had a car waiting.

Watson prodded the police department and they checked every hotel and rooming house. No result. Then they went back over Liederman's trail. I guess his name was Liederman. When they couldn't locate his residence, or find the workshop he had mentioned, Watson lost his temper. He hired every private dick in town. They're still poking and prying into attics and cellars.

Somewhere in this city there is a workshop. I hope that our detectives never find it.

Because there was a possibility that the two men might have represented some foreign nation, we told the State Department about them. They say there isn't a whisper anywhere in the world of a new source of power. They think we're probably lying about the whole thing, but they watch anyhow, for we might be telling the truth.

The two men? I remember how carefully Liederman handled that box, as if it had TNT in it. . . .

And Schultz—poor devil. He recovered from the slug. He mopes around his laboratory, swearing to himself. He buys bushels of peanut tubes and winds some of the craziest coils you ever saw, and when he doesn't get any results, he swears weakly and tries again. I hope he never gets any results, but he's an engineer and he saw that generator. And he will continue trying to duplicate it until he dies.

And me? Every time the light flickers from any cause, I almost have heart failure. . . .

Next Issue's Featured Headliners

THE DARK WORLD

A Masterpiece of Fantasy

By HENRY KUTTNER

•

THE DOUBLE MINDS

A Penton and Blake Novelet

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•

PLUS MANY OTHER STORIES AND FEATURES

The Martians Came to Dinner

By CHARLES A. STEARNS

THERE is no denying that Mrs. Worthington-Smythe was a snob. But, being an interplanetary snob, she deserved, at least, credit for a unique approach. It was not easy to remain aloof on an uncharted world fifty-million miles from Earth, and yet Mrs. W.-S. managed it.

She lived apart from the closely-knit Terran colony, in a palatial, bubble-dome in wildest Central Mars, while her husband attended the offices of Colonial Administrator a hundred miles distant.

This is not to say that Mrs. Worthington-Smythe was left alone. Far from it. There were her two children, pale, worldly striplings both, who had seen everything that half a dozen worlds had to offer, and who were currently bored stiff with the Martian desert.

Then there were the interminable house guests. Sometimes a dozen or

They were an odd folk of bygone centuries

more. There were only three that eventful weekend, which was fortunate. (Or inadequate, depending entirely upon one's point of view.)

Ordinarily, these transient boarders were of the elite, interplanetary set. Mrs. Worthington-Smythe never mingled with locals. The Ahrimans, for instance, who were her only neighbors within fifty square kilometers, she had never met.

They were an odd folk, who lived in a quaint, old-fashioned house of bygone centuries, dating, no doubt, from the days of the early prospectors who had come and gone, leaving the miners to settle in their isolated communities, wrest the wealth from the ground, and take their leave, in turn.

Curiously, these early settlers had lived their own insular lives, earth-style, without seriously attempting to explore the land. Individual attempts had usually ended in tragedy.

A fact which led Miss Carstairs, the blonde and middle-aged daughter of a shipping magnate to declare five or six times each day of her visit, "But my dear, you must be very *brave* out here in the desert all alone, with ferocious savages all around you. And I hear they're (a delicious shudder) *cannibals*, too!"

Miss Carstairs appeared not to consider the rather pertinent fact that they were also surrounded by a fortress-like stockade.

"Heavens, no!" Mrs. Worthington-Smythe said, "Why, I've never even seen a native. *Heard* them, to be sure, but after all, there's the high wall around the place, and—"

"Heard them?"

"Oh, you'll hear them too, my dear. At night. They howl incessantly. At least I'm told it's the aboriginals."

MR. WRIGHT, an iron gray little man with more corporations than fingers and toes, leaned forward in his chair with sudden interest. "It's my first trip to Mars, you know. I'd like to meet one of those chaps—over the sights of my .270, I mean."

The third guest, an ascetic looking young man, cleared his throat. When Mr. Ellington cleared his throat it usually meant trouble. Mr. Ellington was burdened with what is known as a social conscience, and he was unable to hide this rare, spiritual light under a bushel for very long at a time.

But he was frightfully clever, and his presence lent tone to any group, a fact which caused Mrs. Worthington-Smythe to overlook the knowledge, which she carefully concealed from the others, that he was merely "civil service."

"Harmless, really," said Mr. Ellington. "Though they really are homophagous, I'm told. It isn't surprising, considering the sparse life of the desert. One has to subsist some way. Perhaps our own race, under different circumstances, even at its present stage of development, might—"

"Mr. Ellington!" protested Miss Carstairs haughtily.

"It's possible. These are a humanoid race, though somewhat lower in the scale of evolution than our own. Why, there are even legends of such things among our own people. The old histories refer to it in several places, though it has been generally decided, nowadays, that human cannibalism was a myth. There was simply no reason for it on Earth, productive as we know the planet to be."

"I'd like to go after the blighters," said Mr. Wright, whose interest was singularly confined to banks and bloodletting.

"My husband could organize an official hunt, I suppose," Mrs. Worthington-Smythe said cautiously, "if I asked him to. Though the government frowns upon individual safaris these days."

"Do you really think he could?" said Mr. Wright.

"I'm sure of it. I'll call him Saturday and have him secure the necessary permits."

"It sounds exciting," Miss Carstairs said.

"None for me, thank you," said Mr. Ellington.

There was a slightly awkward pause, as after the first drops of cold rain at a lawn party. Mr. Ellington, perceiving it to be his fault, as usual, changed the subject.

"That interesting place across the dunes," he said suddenly. "Who lives there?"

He could have chosen a better subject.

"A local family," Mrs. Worthington-Smythe said. "You'd hardly wish to meet them."

"Oh, but I would," said Mr. Ellington. "Think of the facts they may be able to give us concerning native lore. If they've lived here very long they'll know quite a lot about the place."

"Well, I—really—"

"Couldn't you invite them over?"

Mrs. Worthington-Smythe had the sinking feeling that always preceded social disaster. They'd be completely impossible; just her luck. On the other hand, one's responsibility as a hostess. . .

"Of course," she said with unhappy inspiration. "We'll have a little party tomorrow night. I'll send a servant over to invite the Ahrimans. No—I'll ask them myself, in person. Tomorrow."

And with this decision the subject was gratefully abandoned. Drinks were ordered all around. The conversation gained an even keel once more and progressed satisfactorily until bedtime.

IT IS hard to say what possessed Mrs. Worthington-Smythe. The guests were all in bed, and the house was silent.

She stood alone upon the narrow balcony outside her room and reveled in the clear, thin Martian night air. She was, ordinarily, a phlegmatic woman who lived by prearranged schedule, in solid reality. But the night was warm and romantic, and the lights twinkled in the darkness. They came from the windows of the old house.

How venturesome, she thought, if I should go there now, alone! And straightway the decision was made.

She threw on a coat and made her way to the copter roof, where her private runabout waited. She stood for a moment, shivering in the breeze that was not as warm as before. From across the desert a sound was wafted on the wind. A faint, but unmistakable howl.

But there was mettle in the makeup of Mrs. Worthington-Smythe. The copter rose silently and glided across the sands, sparkling whitely below her in the light of double moons.

She landed in front of the gloomy place and walked boldly up to the front door. There was an ancient brass knocker. She had read about such devices in her history books. She raised the knocker and banged it twice, listening. She thought there was a stirring sound inside, but couldn't be sure.

She knocked again. There was a padding of feet. The door cracked open cautiously. A head protruded. A dark and foreign-looking head, but withal, classically handsome.

"How do you do?" Mrs. Worthington-Smythe said. "I'm your neighbor." And she introduced herself.

"Ah!" the head said, "from across the desert!" And the voice held an indefinable accent. The door opened wider. "Won't you come in?"

"Thank you, no," said Mrs. Worthington-Smythe, who felt understandably reluctant. "It's quite late, and I haven't much time. You must be Mr. Ahriman."

"I am," said Mr. Ahriman. He was a smallish man, darkly silhouetted against the dimly-lit hallway.

"I have come to ask you—that is, we are having a party tomorrow night, and I should be delighted if you and your family would come." Mrs. W.-S. had a vague idea that there were a good many of the Ahrimans.

"This is sudden," Mr. Ahriman said. "I—"

And it was at that precise moment

that the sound came. It rose from somewhere behind the house and hung, piercing, lugubrious, in the air, nerve-shattering, splitting the night into fearsome shards.

"Do not be afraid," said Mr. Ahriman.

"I am not," replied Mrs. Worthington-Smythe stoutly, "though the constant bedlam at night does get on one's nerves. You'll be glad to know that we have decided to deal with these creatures soon."

"How is that?"

"We are organizing a hunt. You may come along if you wish. There will be government guides, and I assure you it will be quite safe."

Mr. Ahriman was silent for a moment. He seemed shocked. "Do you think that it is—well, advisable? It seems almost like *murder*, doesn't it?"

"Oh, my dear sir!" said Mrs. Worthington-Smythe scornfully, "It's not as though they were human beings!" She remembered Mr. Ellington's words and repeated them gratefully.

"But supposing that, instead of savages," said Mr. Ahriman, "they are simply an older race, in decline. Beings who are forced to live as they do through circumstances. I have lived here in the desert a long time, and I urge you to reconsider."

"They howl," said Mrs. Worthington-Smythe stolidly, "and I am told that they have tails. There are certain other things about them, too. They are animals, and quite possibly dangerous. I shall instruct my husband to bring guides and rifles on Saturday."

Mr. Ahriman shrugged.

"Will you come tomorrow night?"

"We shall be delighted."

"Do not bother to be dreadfully formal," said Mrs. Worthington-Smythe, "It is a small house party."

Mr. Ahriman showed his teeth pleasantly. They were fine, white teeth. "I believe there need be no worry on that score," he said, "though we seldom visit anyone. The last family who lived here left rather precipitately, leaving much clothing behind, among it several dinner jackets, I remember. As a matter of fact," he laughed apologetically, "it was they who built this house, and much of the furniture in it is theirs."

"It is a lovely place," said Mrs. Worthington-Smythe. "So quaint. . . .

"I must be going," she said finally. "Dinner is at eight, Marstime."

"We shall be there," Mr. Ahriman said. "Good night."

FRIDAY was a century in passing. At least it seemed so to Mrs. Worthington-Smythe, who keenly felt the responsibility of the coming night. There was a pall upon the house which she could not explain. There was a thick, cloying ennui that affected every guest.

They chose to loll upon the couches of the sun room, and they spoke rarely, and in monotones. Mrs. Worthington-Smythe, however, knew the value of keeping busy. She spent the afternoon in a flurry of preparation and planning. And darkness came at last.

The clock in the hallway chimed seven-thirty in a musical, brass voice, and the doorbell echoed it. It was quite dark outside now, and the evening had grown cold.

"Midge!" called Mrs. Worthington-Smythe. "Midge, answer the doorbell." But the butler was in another part of the house. She'd have to answer it herself.

She hurried, and yet her feet seemed strangely weighted down, so that walking was difficult. It was in her mind, she knew, a strange reluctance . . . she opened the door.

It was the Ahrimans, all right. There were quite a lot of them, waiting patiently there in the gloom.

Mr. Ahriman smiled pleasantly, white teeth flashing, and bowed. They were dressed in white ties and tails. Long, furry, prehensile tails.

They were dressed fit to kill, and it goes without saying that the party was one howl of a success. . . .

STOLEN CENTURIES

By

OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

He wanted a second chance three hundred years later

BLEARY-EYED and unkempt, with a three days' growth of beard covering his lean jowls, his threadbare suit unpressed and baggy, Fred "Fly" Jorgeson shuffled to the park bench, sat down heavily, and sighed dejectedly.

Jorgeson had seen better days—much better. For years he had made a splendid living with his "Human Fly" act, climbing the sides of skyscrapers as an advertising stunt while crowds gaped, watching for him to fall.

He had never fallen, but others of his profession had, and finally the authorities everywhere had prohibited such ex-

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hibitions. No more Human Fly acts would be permitted. Ergo, Fly Jorgeson, as he was called everywhere, was suddenly without the highly paid jobs and the adulation of the crowds which had been the breath of life to him.

He had never saved his money, had learned no other trade or profession, and with other more highly trained men jobless, he found it impossible to get work. He soon found himself flat broke.

He then took to panhandling, usually getting enough nickels and dimes in a day for his food and a cheap flop.

His last dime was gone now. Soon he must leave the languid comfort of the park bench and resume his panhandling, in order to obtain the food and the flop house bunk that would see him through the night.

A discarded newspaper lay on the bench beside him, and picking it up, he glanced idly through the "Help Wanted" columns of the classified section. Suddenly, a small ad caught and held his attention:

> WANTED: Experienced mountain climber. Easy work. Excellent pay. Applicants call in person, 1332 Poinsettia Drive, and ask for Professor Hartwell.

Jorgeson frowned and considered. That address would be at least a five mile walk from where he sat. But didn't he walk a good fifteen to twenty miles a day, anyway? And the panhandling might even be better-out Poinsettia way, whether he landed the job or not.

He tore the ad from the paper, thrust it into his coat pocket, lurched to his feet, and slouched off on his way.

1332 Poinsettia Drive was a typical California bungalow, set in spacious grounds, dotted with trees and surrounded by a high, woven wire fence.

JORGESON stood for a moment, peering through the wire meshes of the gate, trying to gather courage to enter. He was painfully conscious of his unshaven, unkempt appearance. For a moment, he was tempted to turn away and give up the quest.

Then he saw a white-haired, bespectacled man of about his own size and build emerge from a side door and walk out into the yard. He made a queer, clucking noise, and a squirrel came scampering down the nearest tree, then ran toward him and halted with bushy tail arched.

The man produced an acorn from a bulging coat pocket, and handed it to the squirrel, which sat there on its haunches, nibbling and jerking its tail. It was soon followed by another and another, until no less than a dozen squirrels surrounded the old man.

This sight decided Jorgeson. Undoubtedly, this was Professor Hartwell. A man who was kind to animals would also be likely to be kind to a fellow human being in distress. The Fly opened the gate and entered.

The squirrels scampered away at his approach. The old man rose to his feet, rattling the acorns in his pocket as he appraised the Fly with keen gray eyes that looked out through his gold-rimmed glasses from beneath bushy white brows.

"Well, what can I do for you?" he asked crisply.

"I've come in answer to your ad in today's paper," Jorgeson replied.

"You are an experienced mountain climber?" the old man asked.

"I can climb anything that's climable," Jorgeson responded.

The professor considered, stroking his chin as he looked the Fly over from head to foot.

"Hm-m. Your appearance isn't especially prepossessing — but you're my only applicant, thus far. There must be a dearth of unemployed mountain climbers in these parts. Are you strong?"

"My muscles are still hard, and my wind is still good. Feel."

Jorgeson flexed at biceps, and the professor thumbed it for a moment. Then he poked his back, leg and abdominal muscles.

"Pretty fair, at that," he said. "I guess

you'll be able to make it. You are hired for two days. The pay, when you've completed the job, will be one thousand dollars. Satisfactory?"

Jorgeson gulped in surprise, and nodded, too astounded for words.

"Good. Then come with me. I'll fix you up with a shave, a bath, a square meal, and some clothing and shoes. You and I are about the same size, and I believe my spare outfit will fit you. Come along."

Jorgeson followed the professor into the house, and through a long room that was fitted up as a laboratory, with an imposing array of test-tubes, microscopes, cages of fruit flies, guinea pigs, and the usual paraphernalia of the biochemist, then down a hallway and into a tiled bathroom.

An hour later, bathed, shaved, fed and wearing a pair of his employer's whipcords, with high-laced, hob-nailed boots, flannel shirt, and leather windbreaker, the Fly felt like a new man as he helped the professor load the luggage into the tonneau of a large, powerful sedan.

They sped away, heading for the mountains. Jorgeson grew quite curious about this mysterious trip. However, the professor was not communicative. Presently they turned off the paved highway, and took to a rutted dirt road, which circled steeply upward through the trees. This was succeeded after several miles by a little used "stump" road cut through the timber.

This road came to a sudden end at the base of a steep cliff, which was almost perpendicular. The professor climbed out stiffly, and Jorgeson got out on his side, flexing his muscles, numbed by the long ride.

"Think you can climb that with a load on your back?" asked the professor, nodding toward the cliff.

"For me, climbing that will be like taking candy from a baby," the Fly replied, with a grin.

"Good. We'll camp here for the night, then tackle it the first thing in the morning. But now we eat."

Jorgeson's eyes bulged as he turned and saw the elaborate array of cans, parcels and bottles the professor was setting out on the checkered oilcloth he had spread on the ground. The old man, noting his look of astonishment, smiled slightly.

"This is to be my last dinner for a long time. Also, it is a celebration of the culmination of a lifetime of labor and research."

"Looks like a banquet, to me," said the Fly.

"Let us make it a banquet—for two," the professor replied. "We'll eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow—" he paused for a moment, as if he had been about to say something he wished to conceal—"for tomorrow we part forever!" he finished.

Jorgeson joined in the preparations with gusto—and in the feast that followed. They washed down their caviar and anchovies with a fifth of a quart of sauterne. A bottle of Burgundy blended perfectly with their thick steaks, smothered in mushrooms. And another of Pedro Domecq, 1882, flamed blues above their *crêpe suzettes* and topped off their *café cognac*.

BY THIS time the Fly was in a roseate glow. The professor grew talkative, even boastful. "I suppose you've been wondering what all this is about. Jorgeson," he said. "Wasn't going to tell you at first, but hell, you're a good fellow, and have turned out to be a real pal, so why shouldn't I tell you? I've got everything fixed, so there's nothing you or anyone else can do about it, anyhow."

The professor paused, drew a deep breath.

"Do you realize that you are the last man I am going to see for three centuries! Picture that, Jorgeson. In three hundred years I'll be alive, just as I am today, ready to step into a new world—the hero of the hour—with historical knowledge that will have been long forgotten."

The Fly looked at him skeptically, as he mixed himself another coffee and brandy, half and half.

"I see you don't believe me," said the professor, reaching for the brandy bottle as Jorgeson put it down. "But it's a fact, nevertheless."

He took a small leather case from his breast pocket. Opening it, he revealed a hypodermic syringe on one side, a small brown bottle on the other.

"See that bottle?" he asked. "Elixir of life, that's what it is. Temporary immortality in a bottle. Tomorrow I'll shoot that into my arm—go to sleep for three centuries, and wake up alive and well."

"How do you know you can do all this?" asked Jorgeson, interested in spite of his skepticism.

"Experiments. Thousands of them. Mediterranean fruit flies, guinea pigs, monkeys, white mice. Proper dosage puts any of them into a state of suspended animation for four of their normal lifetimes. And they wake up at the proper time—depending on the dosage and the weight of the animal—carrying on from where they left off, and living out the balance of their lives as if nothing had happened. Talk about Rip Van Winkle! What was supposed to happen to him could really happen to any one—except the aging proces—with my serum."

"But how do you know what might happen to your body while you're sleeping? Cold, storms, attacks of animals—how can you survive these?"

"Simple. All taken care of. I've got a vault all built — airtight, insulated against outside temperatures, prevents dehydration, freezing or over-heating. Air conditioning apparatus that will start up as soon as I move and have to breathe again. Man, didn't I tell you I've been preparing this for a lifetime?"

"But how will you be able to get out of the vault? I suppose there will be a thick, heavy door. What if you are too weak to move it when you awaken?"

"Just a matter of perfect timing. The door will open automatically at the right time. In fact, I've made it so it can't be opened any other way—to keep out possible vandals. Know anything about the equinoxes?"

The Fly harked back. After all, he had had an education.

"Very little. Studied it in school. They shift periodically, don't they?"

"Precisely. And what effect does that have on the stars in the northern heavens? Right now, Polaris is the North Star. But do you know that about in the year B.C. 3,000, Alpha Draconis was the pole star, and that some 12,000 years from now Vega will occupy that position? "Listen, the movements of the Earth around the sun and on its axis, despite the slight polar wobble, can be more safely depended on over a period of years, than the most precise and efficient instruments invented by man."

"But, I don't see—"

"I'll explain. I've a tube shaped like a telescope trained on the northern sky in a certain direction. Beneath it, is a composite and extremely complicated device of my own invention, protected by a small dome of quartz, and operating like a photo-electric cell, but with this difference. It doesn't respond every time light strikes it. There must be a special *combination* of light rays—a combination of certain pinpoints of light, in short, agreeing precisely, not with the stars which are shining in that tube tonight, but with those which will shine into it *three centuries hence*, when the Earth has shifted its position relative to the sidereal system."

"And then what happens?"

"Simple enough. It will work just like the time lock on a safe. The mechanism for opening the door is set in motion—the door swings open."

"Not so simple," the Fly disagreed. "What if it should be a cloudy night?"

"That's provided for also. There will be enough food, water and air in the vault to last ninety days. The chances are millions to one that there will be at least one clear night during that period.

And only one will be required for my purpose."

AT THIS point, Jorgenson noted that the professor's head was beginning to nod. A moment later, he rose, mumbling something about bedtime, and retired to his mattress.

For a long time the Fly lay awake, looking up at the gleaming stars, and thinking.

If only *he* could get that bottle of serum—immure himself in the vault. He was a misfit in this generation. All of his chances had vanished. True, he would have a thousand dollars tomorrow, but he knew himself too well to believe he would have it long. There would be a spree of spending, and within a month at the most he would be back on the street panhandling.

But if he could wake up in a new world three centuries hence—a world in which he could emerge as a hero, the center of attraction, the wonder of all time, a man who had remained in a state of suspended animation for three centuries—what a chance there would be for him to live as he had lived in the good old days—or even better.

As for that old codger snoring across from him, what good would it do him to traverse the gap of three centuries? Why, he must be at least sixty-five years old—with one foot already in the grave. He would totter into it a few years after he woke up. But the Fly, a man of only thirty, could look forward to perhaps a half century of life.

Thinking along these lines, and trying to evolve some scheme that would enable him to take the place of the professor, he presently fell asleep.

Jorgeson woke with a hangover. The professor, however, showed no signs of his celebration; he was as businesslike and taciturn as if nothing had happened. He dosed the Fly with aspirin and black coffee, and, after they had had their bacon and eggs, they loaded the equipment which the professor wished to move up to his vault, on their backs. They bound themselves together with a twenty-foot length of rope, and taking up their alpenstocks, began their climb up the steep slope.

To the Fly, accustomed to supporting himself for long stretches on the side of a building, the climb was ridiculously easy. The professor, though surprisingly strong and agile for an old man, could not have made it without help.

After a climb that took them well into mid-morning, they reached a ledge about two feet in width. Above this ledge, the cliff towered, as sheer and straight as the side of a building, for about a hundred feet. The Fly wondered how he was going to be able to get the old man up that wall. Then he noticed a knotted rope with a hook at the end, dangling within easy reach from the top of the cliff.

The professor unstrapped his pack and lowered it to the ledge. Then he fastened it to the hook in the end of the rope, and went up, hand over hand, with surprising ease for a man of his age. Jorgeson decided that he must have made this trip many times before—perhaps alone, perhaps with others to accompany him as far as the ledge. Obviously, he must have moved a great many heavy things to the cliff top during the time when he was building his vault.

Tilting his head far back, the Fly saw the old man crawl over the edge of the cliff. A moment later, he began pulling up the pack he had hooked on the end of the rope. Once he had it on the cliff top, he dropped the rope again.

"Take off your pack and fasten it on the hook," he ordered.

JORGESON complied, and watched Hartwell draw up the second pack. To the surprise of the Fly, he did not drop the rope again. Instead, he held a leather wallet out over the edge and dropping it, said:

"Catch."

The Fly caught it, and opening it, found within ten crisp one hundred dollar bills.

He looked up, and saw that the old man was watching him.

"Your job is over, and that's your pay," he said. "From here, I carry on alone. You know something I had intended no man of this generation to know. But, before any one can get here, I'll be sealed in my vault, which is well camouflaged. I wouldn't advise you to try to find it. And don't try to drive the car back to town. I smashed the carburetor, this morning. Take it off, walk back to town, and buy a new one. Then you can come back and drive the car away. It is yours, with everything in it."

He drew back out of sight without a word of farewell, and Jorgeson, after standing and staring until his neck ached, realized that he had gone for good. What should he do now? Should he return to his world, the owner of a car and a thousand dollars, to tell a strange, incredible story which no one would believe? Or should he try to steal this coveted spanning of the centuries for himself?

A crafty gleam came into his eyes. He was glad, now, that he had not told the old man he was the Human Fly. The old buzzard might have taken other precautions. But he would never suspect that he could climb that cliff with ease.

Fifteen minutes later, the Fly was peering cautiously above the edge of the cliff. The coil of knotted rope was lying where the old man had left it, but the two packs were gone, and the professor was not in sight.

The Fly found himself on a flat-topped pinnacle, strewn with boulders, and cut by arroyos in which sparse vegetation grew. The professor had chosen well in selecting this retreat. No plane could land here, and no ordinary mountain climber would be likely to negotiate the steep cliffs that surrounded the pinnacle. Only a Human Fly could make it without the aid of a rope or a long ladder.

A brief search revealed a well-defined path. He followed it quietly and cautiously.

Presently, he heard the sound of hammering just ahead of him. He parted the bushes and peered through. There before him was the professor, standing in front of the open door of his vault, knocking the crate from a machine which, a moment later, he carried inside and bolted in place.

The machine in place, the professor took the leather case from his pocket, and from it removed the syringe and bottle of serum. He filled the syringe, then began to roll up his sleeve.

It was now or never for Jorgeson. Catching up a heavy stone, he bounded noiselessly forward.

The old man turned, apparently about to close the vault door before injecting the serum. He caught sight of his assailant for an instant—then the heavy rock came down on his skull crushing it like an egg shell.

The Fly snatched the syringe as Hartwell slumped to the floor, dead.

Flinging the rock out into the bushes, he grasped the old man's collar, and dragged the limp body out through the door. For a moment, he thought of burying it. Then he remembered that this would take time, and that the professor had told him everything had been timed, almost to a minute. He must close the door and take the serum now if he wished to wake up at the proper time. It should affect him exactly as it would have the professor, because he was of the same size and build, and almost the same weight.

He sprang inside the vault and swung the heavy door shut after him. The locking bars fell into place. There was, he observed, a port hole in the north side, filled with heavy glass to admit light only. The unlocking mechanism was invisible to him—must be fastened somewhere outside—would have to be, as a matter of fact, to catch the starlight.

For a moment panic seized him as he realized that the mechanism would not open the door for three hundred years. He rushed to the door, wrenched at the handle, detemined to give up the whole

idea, and flee. But it would not budge. The professor had told the truth. It could only be opened by the mechanism. And it would not open for three hundred years. He had to take the serum, or die like a rat in a trap.

There was a low cot at the back of the room. He sat down on this and bared his arm. Then he closed his eyes, inserted the needle, and sent the plunger home. His head reeled dizzily as he flung the empty syringe from him and sank back on the cot. Then came oblivion. . . .

GRADUALLY, consciousness returned to Jorgeson. He opened his eyes and looked about him for a moment before he remembered where he was. It did not seem that more than five minutes had elapsed since he had sunk back upon the cot, unconscious. That serum was a fraud. But was it?

By the reflected sunlight that came through the port hole, he was able to see everything in the room, even though he was so weak he could scarcely lift his hand. Presently, he moved an arm, raised it above his head. Something gray and fluffy fell away from it—something which had once been a woolen sleeve, but now was nothing but dust and lint.

He raised a foot. The remains of his whipcord trousers floated away in the tiny air current the movement had caused. The high-laced boot crumbled to powder.

Presently, he managed to sit up, and found himself as naked as the day he was born. The bedding on the cot had turned to dust and lint. Only the seasoned wooden frame and slats remained. Even the springs had rusted away.

He staggered to his feet and made his way to the provision compartments. Eagerly he gulped water—then broke the seal of a food jar and filled his empty stomach.

Having drunk and eaten, he felt stronger. It was true! It was true! He had survived for three centuries. The professor had planned well, and he was to reap the fruits of the endless planning and toil. Soon the stars would open the door for him and he could walk out into a strange, new world.

He went to the port hole and looked out. To his surprise, he was unable to see the northern sky. Yet it had been plainly visible through the port hole when he had first entered the cave. Instead of the sky, he now saw a solid mass of rustling leaves—oak leaves.

Why, what could this mean? There had been no oak tree there when he went to sleep. And the scattered remains of a human skeleton lay among its gnarled roots.

A human skull grinned up at him—a skull that had been crushed in on one side.

It was the skull of Professor Hartwell grinning up at him! Why was it grinning as if some dark secret were about to be revealed. What was this secret?

Obviously, oak trees came from acorns. And the professor, he remembered, habitually carried acorns in his pockets—for the squirrels. So, by throwing the body of the professor in front of the door, he, himself had planted the oak tree. The body had protected and fertilized the sprouting acorn.

But what of that? Something in the back of Jorgeson's mind seemed to be trying to get a warning through.

Then, suddenly, he *knew*.

The oak tree standing there meant his doom. No starlight could penetrate through those thick leaves in the right combination to open the door of the vault. He could not open it himself. And he could not get out through the small, eight-inch port hole.

He had exactly ninety days to live—ninety days of hell. Never would he be able to see the new world of his hopes and dreams.

He picked up the food jar he had just emptied and shattered it on the floor. Then, taking up a jagged fragment, he slashed his wrists, and watched his life blood drip on the floor until consciousness left him once more—but this time forever. ● ● ●

The survivors of the Mars I were beyond hope when the time care for . . .

LIBERATION

THE officers of the *Mars II* stood at ports and watched the battle. They looked through binoculars at the Martians, with their pyramidal bodies, round smooth heads and kangaroo legs. The fifty-year-old hull of the *Mars II* lay half-buried in sand, about five miles off toward the eastern horizon. Near it was a Martian city.

Up in the captain's cabin, Lieutenant Eric North put into words the silent thought of every officer and man. "Do you think we'll find them alive, sir?"

Captain Harrap deliberated his answer. "I hope so," he said at last. "Wayne may be dead, but the others were young enough when it happened so that they may still be alive."

"Who was Wayne?" asked young Lieutenant North.

"Ulysses Wayne?" the Captain spoke reminiscently. "Guess you're too young to remember. But he was the man who designed the *Mars I*. He was an elec-

By SAM SACKETT

tronics whiz, a mathematical genius, a physicist, too. But more than that—he had the vision of Mars, and the enthusiasm to get the financial backing they needed for that first trip almost fifty years ago. . . ."

They studied the scene. North's eyes dwelt on the hulk that had once been the *Mars I*. He mused, "If I were a Martian . . . ."

"What?"

"I'd bring out the survivors of the *Mars I* as hostages to win a truce—if they're still alive."

Harrap said, "The only way to be sure is to find out."

Gradually the Martians gave up. Harrap ordered the rocket to descend. Slowly the space monster sank near the spot where its dead predecessor lay like a grotesque metal ostrich, half hidden from the truth. The ship settled. There was about as much jolt as when an elevator stops, and it had rested.

Harrap spoke again and the man emerged from the ship. They moved through the city, and beyond the city to the sands and the hills. Finally they found a cavern, guarded by a metal gate. The Earthmen entered, and the gate clanged shut behind them.

The cave was black, and they paused at its mouth. A scream terrified them. North pulled out his gun and was ready to fire before his wits settled back. "For God's sake, sir," he said, "what was that?"

"We'll see," Harrap said grimly. "Let's have a light in here."

A crewman played his flashlight around the cave. North's eager eyes followed the circle of light as it picked out the cavern's interior.

The man dropped the light and it went out to the tinkling of broken glass.

They had seen three old men, shrunken, bearded, chained to the sunless walls of the cave. . . .

A HUMAN being could live a hundred Earth years at that time. These three men had been chained in the cave for almost half that time; their remembrances of the years before that were dim.

The darkness in which they sat was made only more black by the fact that, half the hours of the day, light shone in from the entrance upon the rear wall of the cavern. When the light went out, they slept. And so they remained, not twenty feet apart, for almost fifty years; and not one of them had seen the others in all that time.

The Timer awoke as the light on the cavern wall was growing out of dimness. This was the seven hundredth Light of the sixteen-thousand Lights they had been here. Tomorrow would be the seven-hundred-first Light. He stretched as much as his shackles would allow, a practice in which he had had ample time to become adept.

"Are you awake, Timer?"

"Yes, Singer."

Neither was surprised that the other knew his identity. When you have been chained in the same cave with men for half a century, you come to know them by the distance of a clanking fetter or the sound of a voice.

"Observer?" he heard the Singer ask.

"Awake," came a voice from the position where he could most easily see the light on the rear wall.

The Timer asked, "How long until Feeding?"

"Long enough for prayer," the Observer replied.

The Singer began the ritual: "We pray to thee, Marshan." The others repeated after him. He continued, "We thank thee for our lives. . . . We thank thee for the Feedings thou hast given us. . . . We pray thou wilt give us Feedings today. . . . We pray thou wilt deliver us. . . ."

Over the years they had developed an extensive litany—more than they could ever use.

At the conclusion of the ritual, the Timer told them what Light it was.

They sat silently and meditated until the Observer began to describe what he saw in the light. All could see it, but he

was best situated. "The light is growing brighter," he said. "It is so bright that I can see the Pock. So far, I cannot see either the Nub or the Face." When the Nub came into view, there would be the Feeding.

The Singer sang a song in praise of the Nub which brought them their Feedings.

Soon the Observer was able to make out the Nub, and the Singer began to hymn the Shadow and the Clang.

Then they heard the Clang, and the Shadow approached, looming big in the light.

The Observer described it; it was a black triangle with a black circle above it. It was rising. Then there were humps at each side of the base of the triangle. Then it was descending: the humps were gone, then the triangle, then the circle. Soon it began to ascend again, the circle, the triangle, the humps. When it descended for good and all, there would be the Feeding. It was gone, there was another Clang, and each of the men found Feeding-stuff beside him.

The Singer sang thanks to Marshan, and they fell to. This was the first Feeding; there would be two more that day. After the Feeding there was more prayer and meditation, and then the Timer announced that it was time for talking.

Their chief topic of conversation for the past seven-hundred Lights had been whether the Nub, the Shadow, or the Clang brought the Feeding.

The Observer favored the Nub, the Singer the Shadow, and the Timer the Clang. They argued by clearly defined time limits, the Timer keeping count for the other two, and the Observer limiting him.

WHEN they were through with this discussion, it was time for them to play on their Game. The Timer told the Singer and the Observer, who were playing this time, the positions of their pieces. After a long pause, the Singer, whose turn it was to move, advanced his rook to queen's bishop four. The Observer would make his move tomorrow.

It was time now for Prayer before the second Feeding. The Singer chanted the same litany, and they two repeated. Then he sang to the Nub, and they meditated for the prescribed time, as limited by the Timer. Then it was time to chant for the Shadow and the Clang.

But when the singing was done, the Clang did not sound, nor did the Shadow appear.

The Singer was frightened, and his frenzied singings showed it. The other two were frightened in their silence.

This was the first time in sixteen-thousand-seven-hundred Lights that the Clang had not sounded nor the Shadow appeared when they had prayed for it before Feeding.

"Sing us," the Timer suggested, "of the Past." It would take their minds from their fear.

The singer began shakily, because he was still afraid, but at length his voice grew more assured. He sang of five men who had ridden on the back of a comet, its tail streaking red through the black sky; he sang of their coming to the Land, and of the god Marshan and his enslavement of them in the Black Place. And he sang how the god had taken first one, then another.

But when he had finished, there was still no Clang and no Shadow and no feeding stuff.

The Observer tried to escape terror by beginning on last thousand-light's argument: the reasons why the Shadow went up and down twice before the Feeding.

But his voice broke off in the middle of it, and he could not go on.

There was still no Clang and no Shadow.

Then the Observer made his move in the Game. But at the end of that the silence was still unbroken and the light was still undarkened.

They sat in silent terror until there was a Clang, and the Singer began to raise thanks to Marshan.

But then they saw the Shadow, and it was different than they had ever seen

it before; it was long and thin, instead of triangular, and it was oval instead of circular. First there was one, and then there were two, and three, and more numbers than the men in the cave could count.

They screamed their fear. . . .

AFTER a moment of surprise, Harrap called for more lights, and then he and North, removing their masks, descended into the interior. They found that the path which led to the opening went right down into the cave.

On impulse, Harrap called out, "Dr. Wayne?"

There was no answer, but the echoes of his own voice. The three men inside looked at him in terror. One of them was working his mouth, but no sound came out. As he drew close, North noticed that the pupils of their eyes were abnormally small, as a violent reaction from more light than they had seen in almost fifty years.

Harrap addressed the prisoners: "I am Captain Harrap, of the *Mars II*. I assume that you are the survivors of the *Mars I*, under the leadership of Dr. Ulysses Wayne."

North saw that in addition to the three men there lay two empty sets of fetters.

Harrap read off the names of the other members of the Wayne expedition, but the men in the cave showed no recognition. Finally he said, sticking his thumb at his chest, "Harrap." He pointed at the nearest of the old men. "You?" he asked.

The old man blinked at him. He was pale and shrunken; his ribs were visible, and his matted beard reached his knees. "Singer," he replied.

Singer? North reflected. There was no one named Singer on the *Mars I*.

Then another said, "Timer," and the one in the middle said "Observer."

North felt ice press his heart.

Harrap said, "We come from Earth."

The men made no show of recognition.

"We are here to rescue you from the Martians."

Suddenly the men smiled and nodded; their faces filled with life. The one who called himself the Singer said, "We pray to thee, Marshan," and the others repeated after him. The Earthmen listened soberly as they completed their fantastic ritual.

Harrap seemed to age as he stood there. When the litany was over, he ordered the men cut free.

The hacksaw ate through the metal, and the fetters were removed. Crewmembers helped the emaciated prisoners to their feet; but the men were so unused to standing that they collapsed if they were not held erect.

The prisoners took all this without a word; but when they were carried toward the cave entrance and realized that they were to be taken out they began to cry and moan with the feeble strength that remained to them.

"It breaks a man's heart," Harrap muttered to North. North found that he couldn't reply. "Put them back where they were," Harrap said. "I guess they're happier there."

The three old men were led back to their seats and placed in them.

Harrap said, "We'll see that they get good food, and we'll try to make them comfortable. Maybe in time we'll win them over, but probably they've only a few more years to live." He reached into his kit and brought out a biscuit, offering it to the Singer.

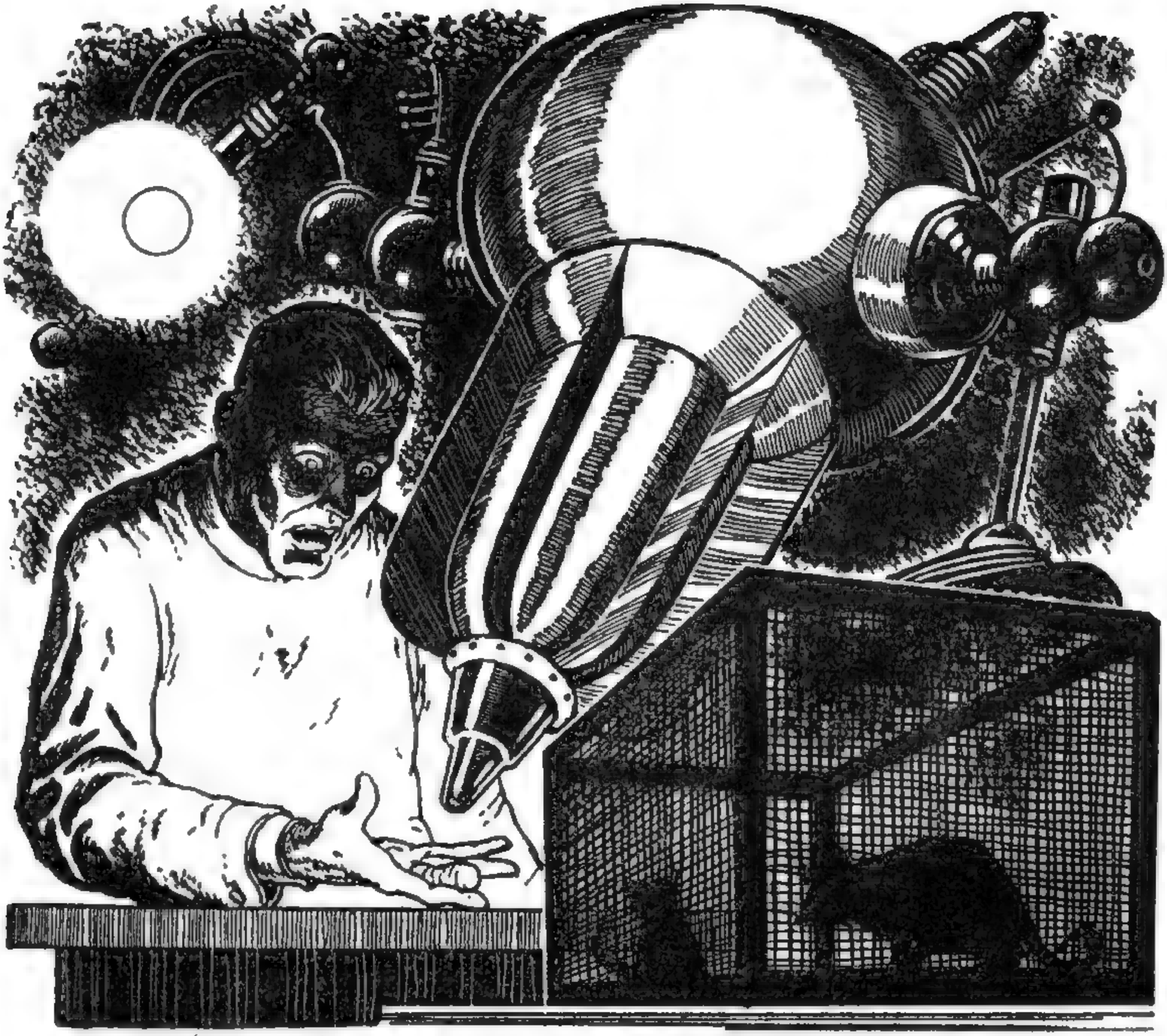
The old man took it and held it in his hands, turning it over and over, looking at it and smelling it.

Harrap broke off a piece of the wafer and ate it. The old man broke off a piece and put it into his mouth. He meditated as he chewed it.

"Come on!" Harrap's voice was sharp. The men left the cave and went out into the cold, red sand of the Martian desert.

North looked back as he left, the grate clanged behind him.

The Singer was still chewing, and still meditating on the Clang. ● ● ●



If only I could cut my whole arm off, I thought. . . .

EXPERIMENT

By ROSCOE CLARK, F.R.C.S.

First by accident, then deliberately, the pathologist carried out his experiment. The horror of it was its phenomenal success

JULY SIXTEENTH: Cut my finger yesterday. Irritating, but not serious. That fool Adams jogged my hand while operating. He's too careless to have around a cancer research outfit. Good with the animals, though.

Working all week on the Webster-Leong cancer transplants. I like the new rats. Better than the albinos; tougher, easier to handle, and better looking. Not

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that looks count, but our operative mortality has dropped since the change-over. Maybe the others were too inbred.

The new growth seems to be just what we want. Webster himself is convinced it is a sarcoma, but it shows no evidence of infective element.

The cells are primitive. Unlike ordinary carcinoma or sarcoma cells. The thing is a cancer, though. A suitable starting point for our work with the new 5,000,000 volt X-ray machine.

Strange now to look back a few years. We thought then that a million volts would give us the answer to the cancer problem. 1,000,000 volts across a vacuum tube, gamma rays, adequate screening, tissue damage restricted, even distribution. Cancer was soon to be one of the curable diseases like tuberculosis or pernicious anaemia. Now we are working with ten times that voltage.

Will the wave-length turn out to be the most important variable? Filtration must be more accurately defined. Detail, detail—relentless detail! Creeping work. A score of minds in half a dozen laboratories creep up on a problem simultaneously and infiltrate, like cancer itself. Then the whole picture becomes clear, and any child can take the credit.

Tomorrow we begin determining the effect of mixed radiations on normal rats. We must find out their tolerance; then specific harmful effects; narrow the range—like using a spectroscope, to secure a pure wave-length. Will it prove to be one particular wave-length or a combination? And they talk of the dullness of science. . . .

July Seventeenth: Work has begun, irradiating whole animals. Narrow it later to affect cell-division only.

Hudson back today. Showed him the new setup. He liked the Webster-Lelong growth. Glad to find him so interested. We need his steadying influence. Yet from the start I had a hunch that this plant was going to get results.

Parsons looked at my finger today. It had been throbbing a bit, but no sign of sepsis. These surgeons can be strangely disinterested in important things. I've known Parsons since we were in school together. In the ordinary way he is supposed to be painstaking. A brilliant clinician. Apparently cut fingers are beneath his dignity. One of his internes would have known more about it.

It is my finger, though. I could hardly expect the same interest from an outsider. Wish he had treated me as a case instead of a friend.

Suppose the pathologist sees things from a different viewpoint. I always liked Moyniham's phrase, "the pathology of the living." My own finger an excellent chance for me to study tissue repair. I can never get the boys to appreciate the importance of those elementary processes.

When the knife slipped there was no pain. In the first moment before blood obscured the wound I could see the full extent of the damage. The whole thickness of the skin had been traversed, leaving tiny capillary points of vivid red in the smooth and satiny surface. I had sliced off a section. In that instant I had rapidly reviewed all possibilities. Should I preserve the slice? Obviously useless. Would I have to have one of those small half-thickness grafts? The thing was trivial. Better leave it alone. I applied the usual dressing after cleaning it under running water. Subsequently I could see no reason to have acted differently.

Perhaps I am maligning Parsons. All that I had thought may have passed through his mind even more rapidly. His lack of interest may have been his way of indicating that he thought any monkeying around unnecessary. Was my annoyance merely that of the pathologist deprived of a chance to show off his surgical judgment? Anyway, the wound will heal soon. Granulation will not be excessive. It is the middle finger of my left hand. Sensitivity will not be interfered with. The thing is unimportant.

JULY NINETEENTH: I am badly shaken. Reading the above, I get the idea that even then I suspected some-

thing strange. Subconscious advance knowledge. A sort of mental preview. The last sentence seems now to have almost a frightening import: "The thing is unimportant."

Last night the throbbing ceased, and I removed the bandage. The dressing should have been stuck, but the gauze fell away and, instead of a raw, granulating wound, I saw only a smooth surface of perfect epidermis.

All of which could only be significant to one who had seen the original wound. What had happened was, by all my former standards, simply impossible.

I do not believe in miracles. Immediately I began to think that healing must have been accelerated by the new rays. A small dose might have reached me in spite of the heavy lead-and platinum-lined glove.

Here accidentally, after all my cynicism, I had stumbled on something of importance. The more I thought of it, the more I became convinced that it should have been anticipated. True, I had not found the positive cure for cancer, but this seemed to offer a method of stimulating wound healing that would revolutionize the whole of surgery. Regeneration at last! My dreams faded into a wildness of speculation, the end of which I cannot remember.

This morning I am calmer. Less obsessed with the accident. I must investigate fully. I shall see Parsons first. He alone had seen the wound. Professor Hudson will be interested, though. He has done a lot of work on regeneration in animals. One of his pet theories is that there is no reason why mammals should not be able to regenerate lost parts as the tadpole does a tail or the lobster a claw.

If all this is true, how did it happen? Radium and X-ray cancer treatment is based on properties of gamma-rays. With radium, the more solid alpha and beta rays have to be screened off to avoid general tissue destruction. The gamma-rays remain. Essentially similar to the harder X-rays. When the million-volt tube was constructed, radium acquired a rival in ray treatment.

Short electro-magnetic waves "paralyze" dividing cells. The term is descriptive, Hudson's own. Varying tissue sensitivity at least partly explained on the basis of selectivity for dividing cells.

In cancer, cells divide rapidly—also in embryonic tissue. Tumor characteristics depend upon this. Gamma-rays can be employed to prevent the completion of division without necrosis or tissue destruction. Short exposures, the correct intervals, adequate checkup, and so forth.

But suppose the rays overlook individual cell elements? Is there immunity? Do they become more resistant? Second treatments after previous irradiation are often less satisfactory. At times growth seems to be more rapid.

Why not this as the answer to my problem? Stimulation by minimal dosage on normal healing tissues. Worth investigating. I must see Parsons first, try to overcome his lethargy.

JULY TWENTIETH: Am I mad, or just carried away by this idea of mine? Thought I could be critical, but here are facts I can swear to. All of Parsons' pooh-poohing can't make me unsee what my own eyes have seen. I had expected more respect for my powers of observation.

The devil of it is that he's my only witness. Perhaps I am making the issue too personal, but it's my finger. And it healed up just about three times as fast as it had any right to.

Only possible explanation is the rays. Why not? It wouldn't be the most fantastic discovery of the past fifty years.

Meanwhile, I have other work. Must pull myself together. Parsons' attitude gets me down more than the actual occurrence.

July Twenty-second: Got Hudson in on my story after all. Concealed my anxiety and told him the tale without any theorizing. He marveled at my finger and, after a little reflection, reached the same

conclusions I had. We continued the discussion abstractly and planned experimental work on monkeys. We already have the detail of their rates of healing. A crucial test should not be difficult. That is, if the effect is a general one.

If there is a limited wave-length range, it will take longer. We can but try. I am less disturbed since the chat. Must try to forget the personal slant. Have to check up on possible leakage through the gloves. May get a clue to dosage.

July Twenty-fourth: Must be getting neurotic. Tingling sensations up my arm from the finger. No pain, but distracting.

The sarcoma grafts are taking well. The rats are remarkably resistant to the new rays. Stand much larger dose than with the old 1,000,000 volt tube. We don't know why.

August Thirtieth: Experiments progressing. Rays even more harmless to life than we thought at first. Now irradiating the rats with the new tumor. No results yet.

Nor from the monkeys. As yet only the mixed rays used. Healing, if anything, delayed by the larger doses. Only to be expected. Meanwhile, I grow more conscious of the finger I injured.

Difficult to describe accurately. Increased consciousness. Not ordinary hyperaesthesia of the nerve injury type. Superficial sensation unchanged. But all the time I know that something is there.

Imagination? A subjective obsession neurosis? My desire for fame making itself apparent through the idea that started from the injury? I can talk myself out of it, but am convinced there is an organic change. The rays have done something—I must find out what.

September Fourteenth: Still nothing from the monkeys. Yet, more than ever, I am sure something has happened. No external changes. Not even the old radium cancers which usually followed burns. I feel we are on the verge of something big.

SEPTEMBER FIFTEENTH: Perhaps I am mad.

Today I plucked up courage to repeat my accident. Wanted to for weeks. Now it is done. I should not have believed it so difficult to cut one's own finger deliberately. Gave myself a local. Infiltration of skin with novocaine. Removed an adequate slice. Tomorrow I shall repeat the exposure to the rays, wearing the same gloves.

All this I am keeping to myself. I do not relish any more of the Parsonian brand of sarcasm.

September Seventeenth: Success. This time I watched it. It healed from the depths! The epithelium did not grow in from the periphery. Am I using my imagination too much? Photographs next time. I must have my data complete before announcing the discovery. Let them play with their rats and monkeys. I shall work on myself.

September Nineteenth: The strange sensations have increased. The "awareness" has spread to my hand and up the arm. X-rays on the nerves? Cut nerves do produce poor circulation and trophic ulcers. Could the rays exaggerate the trophic effect and so accelerate healing?

Direct action on cells, more likely. Which cells? Repairing fibroblasts from the wandering cells of the blood? No other evidence of effect of X-rays on these. Why did the monkey experiments fail? Have they failed? I must worry this out.

September Twenty-first: Hudson saw me today. Told me I looked ill. Suggested I'd been working too hard. Didn't mention the finger episode. Has he forgotten? Does he know what is getting me down? I ought to lay off, but the thing is obsessing me. I must pursue my experiments. Not a small wound this time. An amputation? That would be worth while.

September Twenty-fourth: When I first got the idea I did not think I could carry it out. But I have. Unpleasant, crude surgery. Ring infiltration with local at the base of the finger. Working in the lab difficult. Aseptic technique very sketchy. We sometimes laugh at the squeamishness of the "real surgeons."

One day we'll destroy all the germs. That'll make them mad.

Now I don't feel very happy about it, but at the time all went well. I got Adams to put the tourniquet on. Then he left me without suspecting the truth.

The skin cut was bold. Painless, but strangely satisfying. No bleeding. The knife point found the joint space neatly, and the finger was off—the terminal phalanx rather. I almost enjoyed the foolhardiness of it. Tying off the lateral arteries more difficult. Somehow my fingers got the catgut tight. The skin sutures were a little easier. Did not want them too tight.

I got a large pad over the stump. Then called for Adams to bandage it. He is used to my oddities but I did not want him to see the finger tip. Had to get rid of it quickly, so threw it into the incinerator. I wish now I had kept it.

When I got home I collapsed. After a few drinks, staggered to bed. This morning I went to the lab. Surreptitiously I got the necessary exposure to the rays. Here I am waiting. Waiting for this fantastic idea to be disproved. God, what a fool I am!

September Twenty-sixth: Two days ago I thought that either the miracle would happen or I would go mad. Now it is happening, and I think I am going mad as well.

The finger is growing. After the operation, the wound began to throb. That subsided. Yesterday I looked at the wound. There had been little bleeding but the whole stump was bulging. Stitches tight and beginning to cut. Painful getting them out.

The space between the partly approximated edges was filled with clot; did not then look remarkable.

THIS MORNING I looked again. The clot has dried and separated. The stump had grown. The original skin edges had begun to turn gray, but in the gap appeared the beginning of the new pulp, pushing up like a budding plant.

Fascinatingly strange was this new pathological process I was witnessing. Stranger still that it should be observed for the first time in the history of the human race by someone who, as well as seeing the outward changes, could understand what was taking place beneath the surface.

Only when I begin to look for fuller explanation does the real novelty, almost the horror of its unreality, begin to make itself felt. Can it be repeated at will? Is the thing destined to become a commonplace? If a finger, why not a leg, an arm, the internal organs—the whole body? Potential immortality!

As yet nothing clear. It is all a torment. All I know is that if I am going mad it is not for nothing. It did happen to me. They cannot deny me that.

September Twenty-eighth: The miracle is completed. This morning for the first time I am calm about it. I fear now that I shall wake. Sometimes wish that I could, but this is no dream.

The completeness of the regeneration is not, I suppose, so remarkable unless one tries to picture the controlling mechanism: the regrowth of a whole bone; the formation of a joint with its capsule, cartilages, and synovial membrane; the reconstruction of a nail matrix and a nail—all that in only a tiny fraction of the time required for nail regeneration alone after removal under ordinary circumstances. Further, the skin has developed from the depths of the wound; the epithelium is not from old epithelium, but from some other tissue! What can it mean?

Yet, this is no more complex than the development of the embryo. Same unsolved mysteries involved. I must plan experiments to discover how the process works. I am still convinced that the new rays are the sole extraneous factor.

In moments of distraction I have pictured myself cut off at the neck and growing a new body. This afternoon I must get out of the house. I still have no proof. I think I shall go away, as Hudson suggested. I must think. The future is crowding on me.

October Third: So far I have told no one, done nothing. I am calmer, less excited, less obsessed with the strangeness. I have begun to take an interest in the old work. Perhaps, after all, it was only a dream. Wish I had kept that finger. Might have told something of the inner story.

October Fourth: Sensations are spreading; have reached the elbow and are still moving upward. This morning there was a pain along the radial nerve. I must do something to prove this thing to the rest of them. Bold and final. If only I could cut the whole arm off. The idea does not frighten me, but I can't see how to do it myself. Dare not try to persuade anyone else. Men have removed their own appendices, but an amputation is different—and without assistance, impossible.

OCTOBER ELEVENTH: Awoke today in the Rodney private hospital under the care of Dr. Parsons. All trussed up—and minus my left arm.

Memory pretty hazy. Seem to recall it was raining, and that I slipped in crossing the street. Tried to roll away from the trolley car. Nothing more.

So my subconscious has succeeded in trapping me. I'd been trying to devise a way to get the arm smashed up sufficiently, but in full possession of my faculties I don't see how I could have carried it through.

It was not deliberate, but certainly successful. Now I must wait for things to happen. They have taken it off above the elbow. So much the better. I am confident my arm will grow again. Dare not contemplate the one alternative.

Tomorrow I shall know. Even now it begins to feel tight. I wonder how Parsons will take it. And when it has grown again, what then?

October Twelfth: So the great man isn't coming in today! Sent his junior. That I regard as the final insult. Fortunately young Rawlins didn't want to look at the stump.

I must get Parsons down. Tonight perhaps I shall complain of a lot of pain. When they see the amount of swelling, Parsons will have to come to remove the stitches. Then we shall see.

Wish I had the arm. Next time the severed member shall be preserved, embalmed if necessary. That surely is only fair. It was my arm. No reason not to let me have it just because I'm going to grow another.

When will I dare try it on a leg? Somehow I feel that the spread of the sensory disturbances is related to the capacity for repair.

My God, though, why should the thing heal itself? No exposure to the rays since the accident. What an intolerable fool I am! How can I get out of this? I guess I'm strong enough to walk. Parsons wouldn't come down. I cannot stay here. I must get to the rays—the hell with them all.

Later: after a fight with the whole administration I got away. They all think me mad, but what of it? Parsons couldn't come and Rawlins would not take the responsibility, so I quit. Must get to the plant tomorrow. Even that may be too late. Tonight would be better. But how can I get the machine working? Perhaps the technicians are working late. I'll get right over.

October Thirteenth: Back in hospital. Can't remember what happened. Think they are keeping me by force now. I got into the building last night, but not into the lab. Must have gone haywire after that. I dimly remember fighting.

How I hate it all. Strange, this sudden hostility. Until now I have been fascinated by the importance of the discovery. Now I can only think of it as something horrible. I'm too introspective, perhaps. Wish someone would come to see me. Suppose they think I'm mad, and have barred visitors. Not that I deserve any, after avoiding everyone like the plague for the last three months.

OCTOBER FOURTEENTH: Trouble has started. Parsons came in this morning. Still treats me like a small

child. Ignored all requests for information. There had been very little pain, but I knew the stump was much swollen. Most of the stitches had already parted. He took out the rest and began for the first time to show signs of interest. As he gently turned back the edges of the skin-flaps his expression changed. Obviously he was bewildered. I could hardly restrain myself from a cry of triumph.

He gazed more intently at the wound, then turned to me as though wondering if I was old enough to discuss the thing at all. Finally he replaced the dressings and left the room without a word.

Meanwhile the strange sensations have spread across my chest and down towards the abdomen. Also up the back of my neck. I suppose lying in bed makes one more aware of any slight disturbances of cutaneous sensibility.

So the rays weren't necessary this time! That alters everything. Have the rays already done their work on me, produced some change that is spreading, and with it this amazing capacity for regeneration?

Later: The whole gang came back—Parsons, Professor Hudson, Rawlins, and Westherby, the interne. They all looked at the arm and took no notice of me. When I said anything they tried to soothe me with utter nonsense about its "doing well."

Finally they suggested a bioscopy. Reasonable, I suppose. What do they expect to discover from a segment of the stump? Why aren't they more amazed at what was occurring under their eyes? Why the hell can't they tell me? I'm pretty feeble, but this waiting will drive me crazy.

October Fifteenth: I must think this whole thing out again. What has happened to me to give the power of regeneration? What did we know before? Skin, epithelium rather, regenerates from epithelium; bone from the osetoblasts; muscle from mucle, but only to form fibrous tissue; and blood from the bone-marrow, constantly. Glands hypertrophy when necessary. Same process, different response. No. The adenomatous thyroid, toxic type, regrows and the regenerated part functions. Arteries regrow from connective tissue cells, as does fibrous tissue itself. These we know about. What is different here?

Epithelium reborn from the depths of a wound. Bones reconstructed in their entirety. Two of the three germ layers regenerated from the same region. Totipotential cells. Like those of the dermoid cysts, that grow bone and teeth and hair and skin and pancreas and spleen all jumbled up together in one useless mass. Tissue gone wild!

Can the rays make the cells of the body revert to a more primitive, less specialized type? Or could they act on cell-rests?

The dermoids, those strange half-separated monsters, the gruesome two-headed embryos in the museums, children with extra legs, adult tumors that take the form of an arm, a leg, or an ear —all these supposed to originate in cell-rests. Cells bud off early in embryonic development before the germ layers separate, then lie dormant. What we do not know is why they start to grow. If you like, why they stop growing.

Is this the explanation? Something in the new rays that individuals with such rests can become exposed to accidentally, under ordinary circumstances? Have I received in unusual intensity the unknown factor that has given, in addition, this power of restraint, of being able to build up only what had been lost? I must elaborate. At least there is a plausible theory here.

OCTOBER SIXTEENTH: Turned the tables on them today. Now they think they're mad. Today it looked less like a tumor and more like what it is going to be—an arm. As soon as they saw the uncovered stump they began asking questions. I gave them this journal. A strange dramatic tension in the room while they read it. Then they apologized.

Tomorrow the microscopic sections will be finished. That may help. Hudson

refused to express an opinion. Agreed it was most unusual. Parsons favored my idea of the cell-rest theory, a sort of restrained teratoma. He obviously does not believe that it will grow a hand.

October Eighteenth: I now have a wrist. Occasional tinglings, but otherwise I have been cheerful. My depression has gone. Hudson was in. Had not seen the sections, but asked a lot of questions the others overlooked. I think he has an idea that he is not yet ready to share.

October Nineteenth: They are keeping something from me. I think they are lying about the sections not being ready. These damned nurses have obviously been told to be politely uninformative. They took another specimen this morning. To hell with research!

November Fifteenth: What can have happened? They tell me I jumped from the window and fell four stories. A post ripped my abdomen. Both ankles were fractured, three ribs cracked, and later they had to remove my spleen and left kidney. I had begun to bleed internally.

A hell of a mess, none of which I remember at all. Yet here I am feeling, under the circumstances, remarkably fit. The abdominal wound can hardly be seen, and the fractures are healing rapidly. Three weeks of amnesia, and they tell me I have said nothing. I don't believe them. They are watching me.

Why did I try to kill myself—why did I fail? Am I immortal? If repair is perfect, life will be prolonged indefinitely. Is that the fate of this twentieth-century pathologist? To discover through cold science the answer to the prayers of all the romantics of the ages?

Yet when one thinks of it, there is something distasteful about the idea. Better to have no time to finish all the things one would have liked to have done, than to have so much time that one would never bother to begin them.

NOVEMBER SIXTEENTH: A series of X-ray pictures today. My kidney has regenerated and is functioning. Well, why not? It's only epithelium. Not really more specialized than the skin. Are there functional kidney tumors?

One thing I had forgotten. Nervous tissue, the brain cells as opposed to the fibres, does not regenerate under any known conditions—does not even form true tumors. Will that save me from immortality?

Something happened to blot out my memory. Yet they say I was not concussed. Did I discover something before I jumped? Why did I jump?

November Seventeenth: I have found the explanation at last—and of my own madness too. This will be the last entry. This time I shall not fail. I must die!

Toti-potential, primitive cancer-like cells! How did I miss out on that? How did the others? Or is that what they have been keeping from me? Now I know why I tried to destroy myself. Subconsciously I must have been aware of the horror all along.

Obsessed by the rays and by them alone, even when I thought of the cell-rest theory, I ignored the obvious lead. Even then my subconscious must have been taking control; must have established an inhibition lest I discover the true nature of my affliction.

I cut myself, transplanting the new culture from that rat to me, and the thing spread. Primitive cells with the power of differentiation under certain conditions of the new 5,000,000-volt ray. That strange new product of the Webster-Lelong laboratory! All along I had overlooked the possibility of a transplant to myself from that fateful knife. Where would it end now? Already the nerves of my arm have regenerated; why not my brain? Was it not already being infiltrated by the foreign cells left behind in the wound when I first cut myself?

They have barred the windows, but that shall not stop me. It will soon be over now. I am too much a sentimentalist to be the cold-blooded scientist to carry this through, too fascinated to draw back. I am too human to go on living, knowing that I am gradually becoming a living cancer—the cancer of a rat. ● ● ●

COSMIC ENCORES

(Continued from page 6)

having had no chance to try it out ourselves. But the Army insists that many skeptics felt the same way until they were given a chance to try it out. And they report that although soaked in icy water they were warm.

Thousands of these suits are now being worn in Korea, together with matching boots the soldiers call thermos jugs.

It was indeed high time that science turned its attention to clothing which, in deference to fashion, has always been inefficient, uncomfortable and ridiculous. A man's suit, for example, needs pressing after being worn only a few times—in the summer, once. A man cannot even sit down in a business suit unless he first unbuttons his coat. In the winter he is cold no matter how heavy an overcoat he wears because the wind easily blows up and through its wide skirt and up his trouser legs and his sleeves. His hat is designed to freeze his ears and to blow off at the slightest breeze. His tie is designed to fall into his soup when eating, his shoes, low cut, are so made that he cannot put them on easily without a shoehorn. If it rains and he wears a raincoat it drips all around the bottom edge so that he is soaked from the knees down anyway . . . we could go on forever.

Women, of course, are more sensible. They wear furs in the summer and low-necked dresses and open-toed shoes in the winter. But of course we have always known women were the hardier sex—which is why you sometimes see them in flimsies on the cover, while the man is all bundled up. It figures.

Letters From Our Readers

AND the usual collection of opinions—something new, something old, something borrowed, something blue. . . .

A SAD STORY TO TELL
by John D. Butler

Dear Sambo: No doubt you've heard this tale before, but I wish to voice it again. Why do people (my family, for instance) always damn s-f when they've never even read it; have only heard it second-hand? (That is: have only heard *about* it. Some people won't even *listen*, much less *read* a story.) Of course, some people are deaf, too.

And I love an argument, but do they give it to me? NO! They turn their heads, smiling knowingly, saying: "He'll get over it." End of topic.

There was some jerk (what's his name?) Oh yeah! Paul Mittel-? Buscher? (All in fun, Paul; don't send me a bomb) Well, Paul, there's no need to capitalize the fact that you dislike DeCamp—a lot of people agree with you—myself, for instance. I laugh more when I read GORY TALES. WE ARE NOT ALONE! HOW ABOUT (whoops! A Boo-Boo. Anyway, how about an anti-DeCamp club?)

Hooze udder wun? Bob Stewart? He wonders whether Emsh scrawls said name over his stuff and "Emsler" over the stinkeroos. You forgot to answer, Sambo.

About the ish, I took delight in the Shelton novels, although "D. From D." seemed to me rather stale. I wish to draw and quarter Kelvin Kent for that unfunny waste of space and "Below Absolute" was faintly uninteresting. . . Udderwise, hokay!—*3118 Church Ave., Brooklyn 26, N.Y.*

P.S. Seems to me that predictions are a waste of time. All respects to Darwin but—phooey!

We never answer facetious questions like does Emsh sign Emsler to the stinkeroos—he signs them Pic—sorry that's another joke. You never heard it?

Well, it seems these two young Frenchmen met on the street after a separation and one asked the other "what's new?" and Pierre said, "Oh, mon ami, I am married now and you mus' come over to the house and meet ma femme. She is gor-jus—the blonde hair, the big blue eyes, the perfect figure. . !" So his friend is dying to meet her and he comes to visit. He rings the bell and the door opens and there is this old hag, with dyed hair, very-crossed-eyes and a figure like a sack of Wheaties tied in the middle.

He gulps, but contains himself until they are alone, then he turns on his friend and blurts, "Pierre, we 'ave been friends for fifteen years—I mus' speak! You tell me your wife is gor-jus, weeth beeg blue eyes and a figure! What is this? She is fat and the eyes cross and the hair is like asparagus—"

"Henri!" wails his friend. "You do not like Picasso?"

BUT UTTERLY
by Bill Shirey

Dear Mr. Mines: Just a short note to let you know that you have one utterly confused, jumbled, perplexed reader. I'm talking about DEAR CHARLES in your May FSM. As the writer said

in his letter to Charles, "If you get confused it may help." Well, I'm certainly confused, but it doesn't help.

Here's some questions I would ask of you about DEAR CHARLES. On page 102, second column the writer of the letter says, "In short, I think I am going to marry Ginny. In fact, I already have, and now I want to arrange for it. Now what does he mean by that? He's already married her, hasn't he?

Another question. Now the letter writer went into the future and got Ginny, then they both came back to the present. After they came back, the letter writer wrote this letter. Now the question is, how was the letter there in the future, when the letter writer got there too. He had written that letter in the past and he also had Ginny before he wrote it. So what did he do, make two trips? That letter couldn't have been there in the future the first time, because he had to come back and write it.

And the third question: Why did he write that letter in the first place? He already had Ginny. And he didn't have to tell Charles because Charles already knew that he had and that he had taken her away from him.

I've blown three fuses already thinking about DEAR CHARLES. I hope you can clear the matter up. Also I would like to comment on Jerry Shelton's excellent story BATTLE OF THE BRAINS. In my opinion it is better than many stories published now. DEVILS FROM DARKONIA was a good runner-up. If this was the type of work Shelton could do, you better get him back.

Would anyone like to correspond with me?—*4726 Clay Street, Fresno, Cal.*

There's nothing so complicated about time travel, once you throw your brain away and just ride with the tide. Don't you see—anything the hero of DEAR CHARLES did in the past would necessarily have to show up in the future. Now when he discovered certain things did not exist in the future he knew he hadn't done them in the past, so he made sure to do them. After going into the future and getting Ginny, he had to write that letter in his own time so it would show up in the future and be there when he came after her. He didn't have to make two trips—he could write the letter anytime in the past and it would always show up in the future. Get it? So now explain it to me—these time travel paradoxes always give me a headache.

PLAIN GEOMETRY
by George J. Viksnins

Dear Sam: just finished reading the May, 1953 ish of FSM, so I might as well comment on same and some other matters concerning the Great Five.

All the stories were up to your usual standards, except DEAR CHARLES, which was much below and BATTLE OF THE BRAINS, which was much above. In all, a pretty good ish, but nothing to rave about.

Please don't print all those crazy, stupid time-travel stories, which involve impossible and very technical paradoxes, etc. They don't make good, entertaining reading unless the person wants a stiff dose of mental gymnastics and I'm not looking for that in my reading. I can figure out a hard geometry problem if I wanted that and not read a stf story.

In the letter section, I agreed with one Daryl Sharp on the subject of ye olde saucers. Granted: many of the saucer sightings are fakes, weather balloons, wild imaginations and natural phenomena, but I say that at least 20 percent of the sightings are genuine discs. I won't attempt to guess where they come from, but they definitely are extraterrestrial. If they were our own guided missile experiments, I hardly imagine the brass would be crazy enough to guide them over cities and in commercial air lanes. If they were enemy planes, they would have attacked U.S. long ago, knowing Russians like I do. Secondly, Russians don't have science far advanced enough (neither do we, for that matter) to produce anything that travels as fast as these saucers been seen to have. As Sam Merwin said in the good old times: selah!—*4152 Parkside Ave., Philadelphia 4, Pa.*

A lot of people who like those crazy gymnastics are going to be on your neck, Jhorz. We wouldn't want a solid magazine of them, but one now and then gives the old brain cells a workout and even if you don't understand it, at least it leaves you feeling stretched, which is salubrious.

What do you know about the Russians?

VICIOUS FEN
by Ron Ellik

Greetings: Seems to me that I remember in another of your mags that somebody remarked that you pay your typesetters with confederate money. Musta been the truth, cause in the way of typos thish (may) FSM had more noticeable typos than one of my letters, and that's not praising them!

I think Tony van Riper has a great idea about nominating three stories for future ishs. Why not start up that Hall of Fame idea of Merwin's again? He reprinted some pretty good stories under that heading. I haven't been reading stf long enuf to nominate any real oldies, but some of the titles I have heard being emitted from CE sound real peachy keen. (There, I gave you something to use for the title on my letter if you print it. Print it? What am I saying?) Some of us younger fen, like lots of them older ones say, could really use those reprints to bone up on older stf and find out what they are talking about when they praise stories like Mr. Mergenthwirker's Lobblies, or The Contraband Cow.

So Calkins has turned archeologist on us, huh? Next thing you know, Seibel will start complimenting Mines. . .

Dick Clarkson: *I* wish somebody could teach me Algebra thru stf.

Paul Mittelbuscher: If you think that all of de Camp's plots are uniformly dull and his characters lifeless, then I suggest you read a copy of Rogue Queen. (I think I spelled that right.)

Mines: you goofed, boy. Why in blazes don't you make up your mind (?) as to whether or not you're going to use the editorial plural, and then do so? You switch from first person singular to first person plural so darn fast I don't know who you're talking about. Also, you didn't state yourself properly in reply to Don Allgeier. You say, "Picking stories which are collector's items would be a mistake." But think of it this way, Sam: If you picked stories, constantly, which were *not* collector's items, you would most likely be printing stories which were run of the mill stuff, both then and now. I *know* you meant that picking *only* stories which are collector's etc., but say so, or one of these days some vicious fan might call you down for it.

Now to dig my talons into the pros. Shelton's two were both superb, DfD being the best. Tell me, does Jerry always alphabetize his titles, such as DfD, BotB, and NO DIPSY FOR DIX? I thot KFC was the only one who did that. SCIENCE IS GOLDEN, I didn't think I was going to like. Then I read the first coupla sentences and found that it was a Pete Manx story. I almost jumped for joy! (that's pretty hard, too, lifting this test-tube they keep me in.) First Manx I read was in some anthology, hard-covered. 'Twas called, yea verily, THE GRIEF OF BAGDAD. Then I read in some SS ROMAN HOLIDAY. Now SiG. Print some more, will ya? And how about, if this sees print, giving me a list of the Manx stories which have seen print to date, so I can murder my second-hand book dealer for them, pretty please? About BELOW ABSOLUTE. The thermometer used in tests like that is based on 0° Kelvin, isn't it? I'm not sure of that Kelvin. I only know that the thing is based on a word starting with a K. Tell me if I'm wrong, willya?—*232 Santa Ana, Long Beach 3, Cal.*

Egad—the pain, the anguish of being misunderstood—misinterpreted! Now we know the torment all great philosophers must have gone through. Look, Ronald, first we must define our terms. When you use "collector's item", it apparently means something different from when we use it. From the context of your letter, you evidently use it to mean a better-than-average story, otherwise you wouldn't say the residue would be run-of-the-mill. But that isn't what we meant at all. Our entire method in picking stories to reprint is to hunt for better-than-average stories of any period, not limiting ourselves to specific periods. By collector's items we mean only those very old stories which some fans need to complete their files, or collections, of stories going back to the birth of AIR WONDER STORIES.

Jerry Shelton didn't write DIPSY FOR DIX. That was Larry Clinton, musician, orchestra leader, poet, scholar, horticultural expert. On Pete Manx I think the three you mention are all which have been reprinted so far. More? Okay. The Kelvin scale is also known as the absolute scale, and it goes down to -273.3 which is pretty chilly.

LOVE AT FIRST FIGHT
by Joe Keogh

Greetings, Sam: I certainly must say something about the May ish of *Fantastic*. It had a vague, indefinite, but lovable something about it. It had a generous portion of excellent scientifiction in it. Adieu.—*63 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, Ont., Canada.*

P.S. (No, Sam, you don't get away that easy!) You know I don't mind throwing the odd brick when matters call for it, but it's out of my line to toss praise around freely. It's my theory that (unless things have been completely excellent all 'round) (and I want to get my letter printed) there is nothing more sickening to write, edit, and read as a "rave."

A "rave" is a little too close to flattery for sake of seeing print for comfort. You know the type. "Dear Sam: X-ish was simply wonderful, marvellous, hunky-dory, and how about printing my letter?"

I try to forego these foregone conclusions by vowelizing those two wee letters of our language, O and K. Okay? (I have another sneaking suspicion you might dare to put that as the title of this letter.)

Then down to business. I reiterate I loved the May ish immensely. I must make a comment on DE PROFUNDIS: the first time I saw that story, I viewed it as no less than a work of art. My opinion has been lowered a bit by reading for the second time, but none the less I think it deserved at least an editorial comment.

At first sight DE PROFUNDIS might seem to be just another plot, but consider it again, and ponder on how difficult it was to construct it. The concept of cannibalism, brought in so closely with the alienism of the Shadi thought-processes, and written in 1944!

However, the story that wins my vote for the best of the issue was BATTLE OF THE BRAINS. I like any story along this line, and even though it was quite short, it was really worth the whole mag. I liked the way it was written, the way of its plot, and the very idea. This request may be futile, but I know that a good number of reprint fans like stories along this line, and there *must* be *some* others in those volumes and volumes of Thrilling Stf back-copies.

I found SCIENCE IS GOLDEN very amusing, even if a bit far-fetched for scientifiction, but we do need the odd bit of humor, even in the machine age. Which brings me to another subject: stf-cartoons.

Stf-cartoons are one of the newest and most-welcome innovations to appear in the pro-zines for a good while. Letter-columns (I guess I'm a letter-calumnist) will always be with us I hope. Eventually, *Startling* will go digest-size and slick. Let us hope she still keeps the same familiar battleground of fan-mail. But stf-cartoons are something of a novelty, poking fun at readers of science-fiction, which is all to the good. I don't know which of you, Thrilling or Amazing, stole the idea from each other. Or perhaps, one of you convinced the other. Anyway, to all outward appearances, the mags hit the stands at approximately the same week.

COSMIC CARAVAN shows the beginning of the trend toward "mature" stf in the post-war days, which doesn't make it rank any more than medium

in my book, no matter how precedent-shattering it was.

In the May ish you said I let you down, because I didn't explain why Jack Freysling was able to up and revitalize his weary bones everytime all concerned thought he was pushing up daisies. I will venture to relate the great secret to you, although I counted on your esteemed mental ability to let you figure things out for yourself. (I thought you might already know, seeing as you've seemed to survive all those bombs in your mail).

Once upon a time, Jack's real name was Ughglumph, see? A natural-born Martian. His mother was a perizone-farmer's daughter, and his father was a vigorol-salesman (traveling, of course). Because of this, Jack had the peculiar talent of being a resisto-kinetictechnic-telethensisic, peculiar because at that time nobody knew what that was. In effect, it meant he could be in eight or nine places at once. You go on from there.

Did it ever occur to anyone what risks we fen take, writing in to this Mr. Mines? Actually daring to place ourselves at the mercy of his caustic replies at the end of our letters! It sent a chill through me the other day, when Sam himself said nobody, himself inclusive, fights fair in these columns. There's only one solution to all this: a solution of fifty percent strychnine in Sam's bourbon!

(Did I hear a thud?) Oh well, I guess that means the remainder of this letter will go to the press UNcensored. (Didn't put that chloroform-soaked Marilyn Monroe blotter in there for nothing!)

Lyle Kessler: I don't know why Sam allowed your two mean little paragraphs in FSM, but you don't know what you mean—abolish reprints! The very idea! You know what I do to ones like that? Throw 'em to Hank Moscowitz and tell him they hate Cap'n Future!! You have good reason to be afeared of the answers from us fen.

Now, Sam! I read in the May ish where you said you doted on annoying your Latin teacher. How many times were you told not to write your exercises with your third tentacle? And she didn't find it cute when you leered at her with all six eyes!

Note to all fen yearning with "heart" and "soul?" for pictures and autobiographies of Sam: I refer you to DE PROFUNDIS. Didn't know it, did you.

By now, I'm up to my neck in Sam's little disinfectant spray gun's product (He got the idea from Pogo, but loads it with Fluorine). He's cut off half my letter, bluepenciled eighty or more paragraphs, and sabotaged the rest by dropping it in the office's only Volcano stove . . . but here's a parting shot:

I recant. For any blood-thirsty fen yearning to get an autobiography, life story, and colored picture of Sam, it's only a quarter at your local Rexall . . just ask for the Iodine.—*J.K.*

Three-line-letter and a three-page postscript. Oh, well, never underestimate the power of an afterthought. We are in a very benevolent mood this ayem, and instead of training the big guns on Canada, we are going to let all those insults slide off our Cravenetted shoulders like a duck off a fat man's plate.

Aren't you relieved?

BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES
by John Walston

Dear Sam: The other day I bought the May issue of FSM. Of course I turned right to "Cosmic Encores." WHAT'S THIS, SAM, (Censored) How could you! Are you suggesting that the old Gernsback stories are inferior to the stuff printed in the forties? Dying curses and all that! Repent, Sam, before it's too late. Can't anyone remember great stories like THE CONQUERORS, THE HUMAN TERMITES and THE GREEN MAN OF GRAYPEC to name a few?

There once was a man called Mines
He sat behind a desk made of Pines
Said Mines behind his Desk
"I'll fix those fans,
I'm going to reprint only post 1940 stories,
Then I'll have them eating out of my hands."

Everyone knows that the post 1940 mags were far more mature than the old Gernsback mags. Now I'll quote a passage from the "Ether Vibrates" in the Winter 1946 issue of STARTLING STORIES.

"California, here we come! Batten down the space ports, Frogeyes! Remove the atomic charges from the atom-bombs, Wart-ears, and load them up with incendiary 5,000 octane Xeno. Citizens of Alameda, be warned, Snaggletooth, blazon this message in the western skies—"

Later on I found this passage.

"Wart-ears fainted and red foam bubbled from his lobes. Snaggletooth screamed and fell into the Xeno vat when he saw it and on emerging his fumes fuzed one of the port rocket tubes."

How mature can you get!

And guess what was the lead story? You guessed it! A genuine Captain Future novel called OUTLAW WORLD. Sixty-five pages of High (phew) adventure with Captain Future chasing all over the solar system after a mad scientist out to destroy the solar system called Ru Ghur.

How mature can you get!

Now that I've got that off my puny chest, Sam I'll give my esteemed talk on the May issue of FSM. The stories were all pretty good, but how can you call BATTLE OF THE BRAINS a novel?

Now comes the commercial. Sam I got meself a ditto machine and am planning to turn out an adzine called "Scienctifiction Trader". All ads under one-half page are free and a mere 20c for each additional half-page is charged, so come on everybody, send in a ad if you want to buy or sell anything! Until next time, Sam, so long.—*Vashon Washington.*

Foul, we say, foul and fie, sir! You can't make out a case for or against maturity by quoting Sarge Saturn, who has been decently interred in outer space for lo these many years. Evidence enough is the fact that the Sarge was killed off to loud applause by practically everyone and the big drive for maturity dates roughly from the time of the Sarge's demise.

As for your (ugh!) poem, I have only the following to say.

From John a verse
Couldn't be worse.
He sat and emoted,
Didn't know it was loaded.

SURPRISE
by Dick Clarkson

Dear Sam: I thought I'd better write while I still have time on this vacation left (from here on in, I'm *gal*livanting twenty-four hours a day), and am yet under the influence of your May ish of FSM. Sam, in all honesty, thish was one of the best FSM's I have ever had the pleasure of reading. What makes this one so different from most others? Well, that's simple, Sam—your longer stuff, as usual, was top-flight, but you really faked me out with your shorts. *They were good too!* They were just as good! I mean it. But to start at the beginning. . . .

Fantasy, true, but what's better than an occasional change of diet? Referring, of course, to Shelton's plus-que-par-excellence novelette, DEVILS FROM DARKONIA. By all means, bring Shelton out of his hole. I had more damn fun with that novelette than I have had in a long time in any Thrilling mag. Just plain enjoyment. As to BATTLE OF THE BRAINS, the writing showed some wear-and-tear from slight age, but still enjoyable, like the first ones I used to get hold of when I started reading s-f as a regular diet (never did get a single case of indigestion, though the Boss Man of the family still gets apoplexy every time he sees me with that "crud") right after the war. Small pangs of nostalgia; seldom get the same kind of stuff. As it is now, I'm nuts about the present-day-type s-f, but sometimes I go to the shelf and select one of my treasured 1940, 1942, or 1944 ishes of aSF and read the thing from cover to cover. Just, again, for a change of diet. The former was by far the better of the two, but the other was still good.

The Pete Manx deal was enjoyable, though a little bit too cut short for my preferences. I'd read Leinster's DE PROFUNDIS before, but I'm always glad to re-read it, as his slant is so novel. Unfortunately, I missed COSMIC CARAVAN, getting it mixed up with a story I *had* read when a certain gal forced (?) me to take a break in reading the mag, and I haven't got around to it. Not yet. But the two reprint shorts were more than good; they were rave shots! So far above your average level for *any* of your mags that I actually took a second dig at the contents sheet to see if it was really your mag or had I latched a different one by mistake. I hadn't, and I'm flabbergasted!

But then came the shocker! You smashed me almost out of my mind! Those new shorts were *as good and even better* than the reprints! Why put 'em all together in FSM? They deserved to be spread out; one of them alone would have upped the average of any of your mags fabulously. BELOW ABSOLUTE had everything desirable in a short story: humor, plot, climax followed by a fast and good ending, etc. But above all, it entertained! Which is the basic aim of any short. That one gave me a good session. DEAR CHARLES was fine, too, and my only kick there is that its style left a lot to be desired. But, as all the others in this singularly good ish, it was entertaining. And TO THE STARS rates a place with the rest. . . . I won't, and wouldn't if I could, rate them in order, and this is a perfectly good example why . . . . they were all so good that rating them would place one or two at the bottom, and none of them deserve to be at the bottom of any list! See why I think rating in order isn't square with the deck?

In short, you put out one helluva fine ish, Sam, and my hat is not only off to you, it's yours. (Not that you'd dare wear it. . . . . it's a plaid terror!) There was only one thing which fouled up the entire ish, and that was that you obviously had a new man at the linotype machine. I found weird places all through the ish, but in TO THE STARS, from which I'll cite a brace of examples at random to illustrate, it was unbearable. For instance and namely:

(1) Page 133, Column One, "I want tah tcomputer. . . ."
(2) Same identical place, "He was very much the old man of the tribe speaking. L L L" (*You figger out what those were there for.*)

Now, I gave only two examples, and they were not, by a long shot, the worst in the ish. Just to give you a taste that, no matter how well you may do your job as editor, and no matter how good an ish you may produce, there is always one in every crowd who completely snubs the deal.

I'd be raving here all night if I weren't so sleepy I can hardly see. But if you keep that kinda ish coming out, I don't give a damn if you up the price to a buck:—I'd still buy it.—*410 Kensington Rd., Baltimore, 29, Md.*

As we have remarked before, we never print complimentary letters—that's how you got by. Of course, every time we get a letter which says, "Sam—what happened? The issue was *good!*" our able assistant has to pry us off the ceiling. We got a tall assistant for the purpose. Ceiling is getting to look all beaten up though, not to mention the top of our head where the grass is wearing through. But why should we burden you with our private difficulties? Back to Harvard so they can finish studying you.

THE GUNS OF FORT SUMTER
by Nick The Greek, alias Ralph Butcher

Dear Monsieur Mines: Never having had anything to say, I have never written to a magazine before. After finishing this letter you will probably feel the same. I suppose you are wondering why I signed myself "Nick The Greek." So am I. But enough of this frivolity, let's get down to business.

I think the letter department is the most interesting thing in the book. One thing I don't understand though, you say you don't want long letters, but the majority of them that you print are long—or are those the shortest? (Phew!)

I know the request I am about to make is probably impossible, but I'll ask it anyway: Is it possible for me to get the first issue of FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE? I have all the other issues.

And by the way, before I forget it, Mr. Earls' letter the April issue requested EXILE OF THE SKIES —wasn't that reprinted in your second issue?

Well, I know I'd have made you happier if I had something to gripe about, but as I always say, "I've been reading FSM for nigh on to four years now and it's the only mag I use for fuel in my incinerator!"—*3971 Boone Park Ave., Jacksonville 5, Fla.*

We got over being surprised by anything quite a long while ago. But we hope you're using old magazines in that incinerator, because there's no fuel like an old fuel. Yuk. And you're right about EXILE OF THE SKIES. It was reprinted in the second issue of FSM.

PROGRESS NOTE
by Bobby Gene Warner

Dear Editor: Two things happened yesterday that I took extra note of: the next-door folks got a television set and the May issue of FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE hit the stands (or rack, as the case is here).

Now the first of these happenings I toss aside as just another of those modern-day trivia; but—and a mighty big one, too—the FSM was altogether different. Nothing trivial about *that*. Beginning with the cover, the magazine was truly exceptional. But—back, for a moment, to the cover. I suppose that circle-design is on the cover to stay. I certainly hope so; makes the picture show up better. I just bet that's what your make-up man thought, too. (Let's just face it, Sam, I'm flat good at noticing those small details. Okey, so it *is* self-flattery. But, heck, no one else ever says those things about me. Guy could get an inferiority complex if he doesn't get glory-praise from one source or another. So, I'll stop, cease the tear-dripping.)

I finally unattached (that sounds better than tore) my eyes from the cover (no kidding, Sam, that cover was the BEST I've seen in a long time) and began reading on the stories. I had previously started the BATTLE OF THE BRAINS piece in its original publishing in TWS. However, I hadn't finished it. Liddle did I know what I was missing. Well, I did read it this time. And despite the somewhat unlikely title, it was first-grade material. Has it been reprinted in anthology or book form? If not, it should have been. Ditto for DEVILS FROM DARKONIA. I figured when I saw the title, that it was going to be a hack-plotted bit of grisly writing. But—well, I ended up chuckling and wishing I were in Bradley's shoes right there at the last. As to the illos for these short novels—I'm sure the originals weren't half so good. Poulton is getting more and more like Finlay. Emsh is maintaining his great style which is not comparable to any other artists that I know of.

I would let you know what I think of the other stories—but I haven't read them and don't know myself. But after Shelton's two classics, the others would have to be pretty darn bad to make me think of the issue, as a whole, as anything less than excellent.—*Box 63, Bessmay, Texas.*

Am pretty sure that the two Shelton stories

[*Turn page*]

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haven't been anthologized, but at the rate magazine material is scampering into hard covers, it probably won't be long. A lot worse stuff has been immortalized.

A PLETHORA OF STEWARTS
by Bobby Stewart

Sam Dear Mines: Sam boy, where have you been? That letter that you printed in the May ish was one that I wrote over six months ago. It was the first one that I ever wrote to a science fiction magazine, and since then you've printed my second letter in the March FSM. Wha' hoppen?

That second letter mentioned above was alongside of a letter from another Bob Stewart and it was the first time that I had ever known of this peculiarity of fandom. It seems that there is an overabundance of Bob Stewarts. Besides me and the one in Frisco it seems that there is another fan somewhere with the same name. I have not been able to find out his address, and I would appreciate if someone would send it to me. I have been elected head of the Bob Stewart Fan Club. I am also editor of our official club organ, THE BOBZINE TWINS (each issue for a cover picture I paste a mirror on the first page). All prospective members of this club, please contact Bob Stewart.

I liked that cover, but I think if you look real careful on that green man's cheek you can see where the point of Emsh's compass was stuck. Elementary, Mr. Watson.

Anthony K. Van Riper wins the prize for the best letter. A lot of your reprinted stories sure could stand rewriting. And only going back a few years for material that's not so stale won't help either. Think of all the fans that had read the stuff you reprinted in this ish. All of the reprints but one were from '44 and '45, and *all* were reprinted from TWS. Not that I hadn't read them before, but if you must go back such a short time why don't you get them from more varied sources?

G. Calkins, I too, would appreciate more of the "new-technique" Schomburg illoes. His pen-and-ink drawings are no better than those that are presently appearing in comic books. But really it's not a new technique. He does his covers the same way (except in color) and I vaguely remember seeing some Schomburg black-and-whites done that way. Can't remember exactly where, tho.

Mittelbuscher, do you want to know why Walter M. Miller, Jr., has never written a bad one? That's right, because he's a TEXAN.

I'd say something about that poem you wrote, but I did ask for it, didn't I?

After all that talk you made about you having the last Bergey the last one appeared on the cover of Leinster's SPACE PLATFORM. And they didn't smear it up either.

Thanks from the heart of my bottom for reading this.—*Rt. 4, Kirbyville, Texas.*

If you rewrite a reprint it isn't a reprint any more, is it? Anyway, that's why we pick the old classics as lovingly as we do—because not all of them read as entrancingly as you remembered them. Personally, we don't care what vintage or

age they are from, just so they are still interesting and fresh. Like a lot of our readers.

TRIPLE CONVENTIONS
by Calvin Thos. Beck

Mine dear Sam: This one will be brief for the nonce.

The bone of contention wishing to gnaw over again (you ol' gnaw-it-all) is the state that FSM is in. Undoubtedly it's okay for readers who've been with science fiction a year or less. But please, Sam, start digging back from the bottom of AIR WONDER, WONDER, SCIENCE WONDER, and WONDER QUARTERLY. Some of those oldies may seem so much tripe to you, but for the majority are precious antiques. Mind you, I said *precious* antiques, not old junk.

If it's mags you want to sell, then publish one using only new stories. Although I'm willing to gamble that those fifteen to twenty-five years old yarns will catch on just as well, if not from the point of novelty, surely due to their historical value. However, having practically a whole file of WONDER and TWS, and a few of the QUARTERLY numbers, I think there's some clever material there for all practical purposes.

Down-Under fan Earls didn't know you were a camel, Sam. But he's got an idea there on the use of more departments in your mags. You done us wrong, Machiavelli, when cutting out the fanmag reviews. What the average SF pro-zine lacks today is a little *atmosphere*. About the closest we can get to it are in some of the litter sucktions. In this respect, I think the *Capt. Future*, *SS* and *TWS* of 8 to 12 or so years ago were superior. Not that I am looking for a revival of the relict *Science Fiction League* necessarily; yet a few departments could cheer up things rather well: a section on the authors, some chatter on various SF topics of the times, and articles relevant to STFantasy fiction, like the ones which have already shown up in some of del Rey's or Bob Lowndes' publications, to give you one of many examples, Et Al . . . especially let's not forget *Et Al*. He was once a good editor in his day before being reduced into a Latin expression.

With the Eleventh World SF Convention coming up this Labor Day again, I guess a lot of pros and fans are mulling over a lot of ideas, including some suggestions as to the future of other conventions. Something I have in mind might do a lot in behalf of fans and professionals alike—mostly, however, for the fans, which is the main reason why we do have conventions.

In brief outline, there's no question that each succeeding world con' is much larger in size and attendance than its predecessors ever were. On the other hand, the site always selected for the next year is more often than not too far out of the way of hundreds upon hundreds of others who might like to attend, but cannot due to a long trip, the time involved in travel, as well as accrued expenditures which most usually can't afford.

Now, the fact is that whenever a world con' is being held, the majority of those attending it, per capita, are only local residents. The reason for this may already be found in the above paragraph.

Imagine how far more successful the conventions

[*Turn page*]

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would be in every detail if, instead, *two* or even *three* separate cities around the American continent were able to hold the World Con' simultaneously! Certainly, it wouldn't be a bad idea if this suggestion met with some backing at the PHILCON this forthcoming Labor Day.—*8416 Elmhurst Ave., Elmhurst 73, L. I.*

This is an intriguing idea—three conventions going on simultaneously. Or why three? Logically, there is no reason why there shouldn't be as many conventions as there are localities in each country able to scare up enough fans. Thus the U.S. might have five or six, England three, Africa two, Australia two and so on. The only question is could this old planet stand it? Cities which have gone through the exhausting experience of a world stf convention have taken a year to recover. Large cities, that is. The smaller places have never recovered. The cumulative effect of a dozen conventions going on simultaneously around the globe might have the effect often feared from atomic explosion—might split the planet asunder. And the next convention would have to be held on Mars. And there goes Mars. . .

FOGHORN
by Carol McKinney

Dear Sam: Ok, you can do it again sometime. Shelton's two novels were good, not as good as the pair last year, DAWN OF FLAME and THE BLACK FLAME, but then these were a different kind of story. DEVILS FROM DARKONIA were actually *funny* (the devils, not especially the story). It's hard really to attain humor in a story of that type.

Have you decided whether or not to ask for suggestions from the readers as to what stories they would like to see reprinted? Or do you intend to go on claiming that honor for yourself indefinitely?

I'm glad that you also print a few new stories each time. Some of them turn out to be better than the ancients, though. This time, DEAR CHARLES, was the best story in the whole mag. Ha! a new gimmick for a TT story? ? ? Just tie a string to your leg, zip off to the future, and when you've had enough get somebody to pull you back via the "puce colored mist".

WHAT COLOR IS PUCE???

Please do not reprint any more Pete Manx stories!!! Science may be golden, but the story stunk this time worse than it did when it first came out. Maybe somebody gets a "large charge" out of these mixed-up rat races, but there are others who don't!!

The circle pic is a good idea; don't think of changing the cover layout for a few decades anyway.—*386 No. 8th East St., Provo, Utah.*

"Puce" is a dull red. So why didn't the man say "dull red?" Well, if he had said dull red you would have passed right over it without even noticing it. But when he said "puce" you reacted like a plucked banjo string and you went back

and read the story again and now you'll remember that story the rest of your life and you'll be able to spring a color on the painters come to redecorate the apartment that they never heard of. Devilish, that Leinster. Reminds me of the comment the Englishman made when he saw his first baseball game: "It isn't cricket, you know!"

THE LIFE AND TIMES of Burton K. Beerman

Dear Sam: I've decided you could use some life in the more uninteresting of your three reader columns, CE. So then, here I am.

Calkins better *not* have gone to New York when he said he was, as I just mailed some money to him for OOPSLA. I've been mailing for samples of the different fanzines like mad. If they're as good as I hear they are, I'll subscribe to a couple.

The story by FSM's former mentor has set me to thinking. Suppose I was of such a narcissistic personality that I thought the big names in SF were fighting for my disaffection. Fletcher Pratt writes what I think is pure tripe and I don't hesitate to say so. The stories still appear. Same quality and quantity of tripe included therein. In other zines, Shaver rears his reptilian head time and time again. Now this guy Merwin. Tell me, why the hell must every magazine persist in publishing hard-boiled material? This is especially so when the stories are of a quality so much lower than the original stuff. Merwin, unlike Pratt and Shaver, *can* write a good yarn. Make him do it.

The stories by Rogers, Dick, and De Camp were quite good. The De Camp story left me with a feeling that the central character was analogous with a certain elected (?) official working out of the Midwest. The physical resemblance provides the analogy. Dunbar provides the personality. You know how it is; someone trying in whatever means possible to attain a vicious goal no matter who gets hurt. Whoa. I feel any more of my digressions will detract from the enjoyment of the story.

CE *will* get more lively. That I can assure you.

They've finally put the Draco stories in a book. It's called *Once Upon A Star*.

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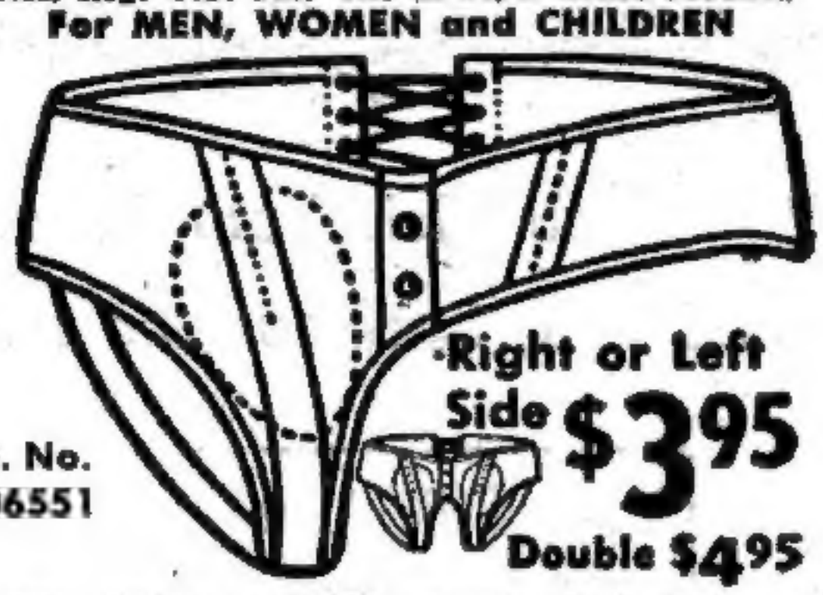

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